HUNTING TROUBLE — HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

15¢

A POPULAR PUBLICATION

Adventure

FEBRUARY

GENTLEMEN PAY

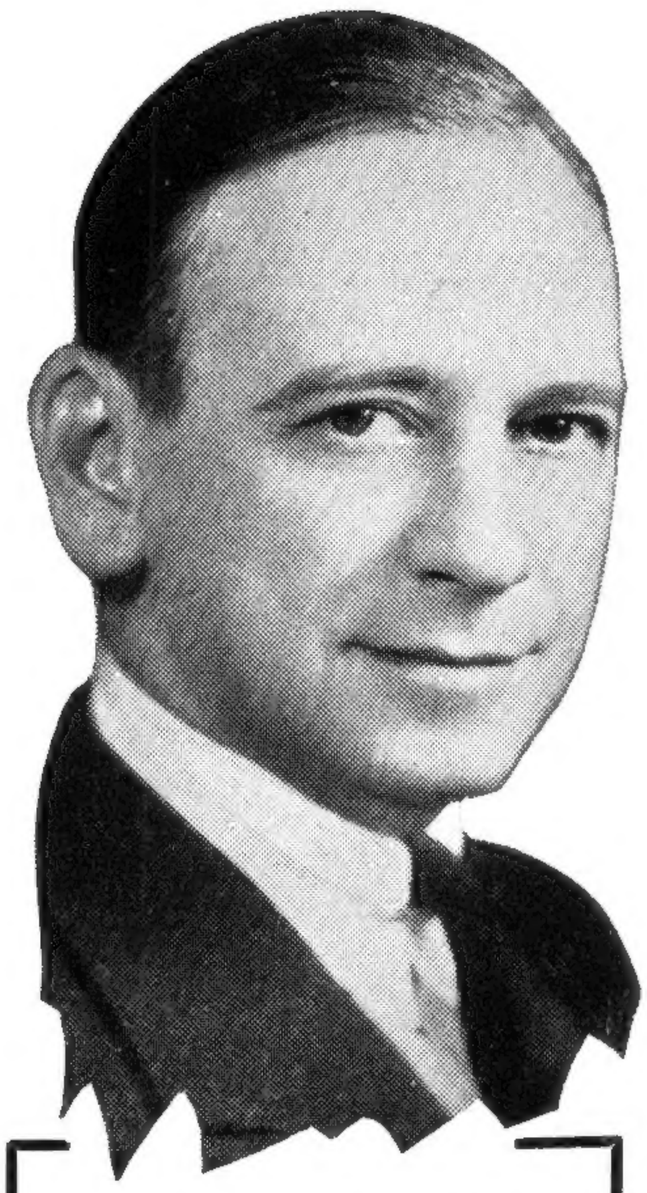
LEGION NOVELETTE

by GEORGES SURDEZ

RAY MILLHOLLAND

RICHARD H. WATKINS

GORDON YOUNG



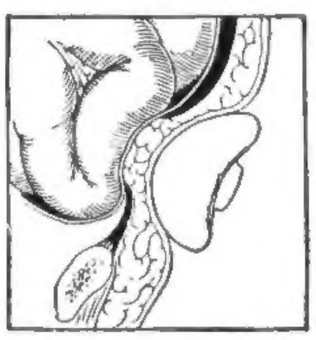
FREE TRIAL *of my* Rupture Invention

If It Doesn't Stop Your Rupture Worries It Doesn't Cost a Cent!

NO STEEL SPRINGS

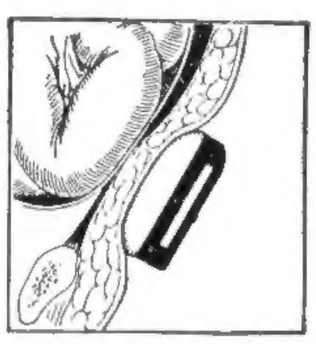
NO HARD PADS

IN MY Brooks truss invention there are no steel springs — instead the pad is held in place by a soft body band that is just as comfortable as a glove. In my design there is no hard pad. Instead there is a soft, hollow AIR-CUSHION, firm enough to always hold the rupture just right, yet soft and flexible enough to give perfect comfort without gouging. If you look at the illustrations below you will see what I mean by gouging.



WRONG

A pad that presses into the opening absolutely prevents Nature from Healing. The opening cannot close up.



RIGHT

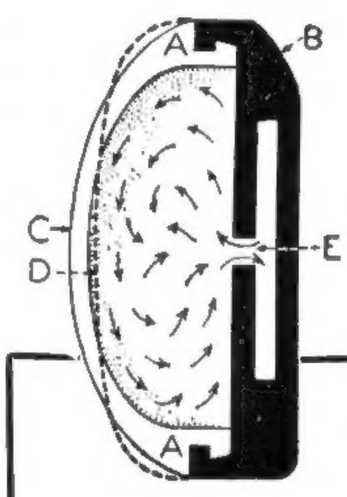
This second illustration shows how the Brooks invention holds the rupture so that the edges of the ring are close together—close enough for Nature to strengthen and possibly heal.

I SEND you my Rupture Invention on trial because ruptured people have been fooled so many times by quack schemes and worthless "cure-alls" that they don't know what to believe. There are as many kinds of rupture trusses as there are blacksmiths. All of the makers CLAIM wonderful and unusual qualities for their products. But I say: "Seeing is believing." If you have a reducible rupture I KNOW what the Brooks will do for you — BUT I won't make any claims. I want you to try for yourself. I'll send it to you on trial. You keep it ten days —at my risk. Lay aside your old truss. Then see how the Brooks Invention gives you these three big advantages. Remember these are **not** claims. These are the benefits the Brooks MUST bring you before you decide to keep it.

1. Immediate restoration of normal physical activities. Walk, run, bend or stoop without fear of having the AIR-CUSHION pad slip and let your rupture down.

2. A Support so comfortable, so light in weight and inconspicuous, that you soon forget that you are wearing any support at all.

3. It Must hold your rupture in exactly the right position to give Nature the greatest chance to heal — to strengthen the muscles and close the opening. If the broken ends of a bone are not held together the bone will never knit. The same with rupture. If the rupture is not held properly Nature hasn't got a chance.



FLEXIBLE AIR-CUSHION

This is the patented, flexible Brooks AIR-CUSHION. It is made in two parts—the soft rubber bulb (A) which forms the pad which comes in contact with the body, and the light weight disc (B) which holds the pad. (C) shows the shape of the soft rubber pad before it is pressed against the body. The dotted line (D) shows how the pad flattens out under pressure expelling the air through the orifice (E) through which the pad figuratively breathes as it adjusts to conform to different body pressures.

• • •

REMEMBER, I don't promise a cure. I don't make any claims. You don't take my word for a thing. You see for yourself and then decide. Send your name quick for my Book and for my Trial order blank. All information is free. There is no charge now or at any other time for all the facts and the free trial plan of this world famous Rupture Invention that has come to thousands of people almost like the answer to a prayer. Surely you owe it to yourself to investigate, for you have everything to gain and nothing to lose. Send the coupon now and you will soon know what it is like to be Free of Rupture Worries.

H. C. BROOKS, Mgr.
173-M State Street
MARSHALL, MICHIGAN

CONFIDENTIAL COUPON

H. C. Brooks, Mgr., 173-M State St., Marshall, Michigan.

Dear Sir: Please send me your Book on the Proper Support of Rupture and also your offer of a 10-day Trial of the Famous Brooks. I understand there is no cost or obligation for this information and that my inquiry will be treated in confidence and all material mailed in plain envelope.

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ALBERT MILLS, President
4939 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

Vol. 98, No. 4 for February, 1938 Published Once a Month

Gentlemen Pay (a novelette) . . . . . GEORGES SURDEZ 6
Sidi Raho's mountain warriors were round them in the boulders, and the Legion company had marched twenty-five miles and fought five hours—it was a dirty afternoon.

The Redhead from Tulluco (3rd part of 5) GORDON YOUNG 25
Red Clark pointed to two still shapes under a blanket. "Take 'em back to town—an' tell Dave Gridger I'm goin' to keep sendin' in his rustlin' friends!"

Traditions of the Deepwatermen (a feature) CEDRIC W. WINDAS 53

The Old Wart . . . . . RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS 54
Braid and a ticket don't necessarily make a sailor—a wave never heard of them.

Hunting Trouble . . . . . HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS 65
Young Hardesty faced a rifle across a lonely camp-fire and remembered—if you make yourself a one-man posse, you've got to be a one-man jury too.

Harness Bull . . . . . ANDREW A. CAFFREY 74
The Cooper brothers were Irish enemies—John was a G-man, who said Mike, the flatfoot, ought to wear a collar sweat-pad and belly-band with the rest of his harness.

Saginaw . . . . . RAY MILLHOLLAND 93
It was lawyers-be-damned, and settle a legal point with fists and boots, between the woods crews of Muskegon Red and Saginaw.

Bayou Booty . . . . . MEIGS O. FROST 103
Murder and swampland vengeance waited in the bayou country, and three old men oiled their guns and listened and knew it was up to them.

Why I Quit the Indian Army (a fact article) PERRY ADAMS 117
"It's a grand life, if—" says an author who fought in Afghanistan.

The Camp-Fire . . . . . *Where readers, writers and adventurers meet* 128

Ask Adventure . . . . . *Information you can't get elsewhere* 132

Lost Trails . . . . . *Where old paths cross again* 4

The Trail Ahead . . . . . *News of next month's issue* 102

Cover by William E. Luberoff

Headings by I. B. Hazelton, Neil O'Keeffe, Amos Sewell

Howard V. L. Bloomfield, Editor

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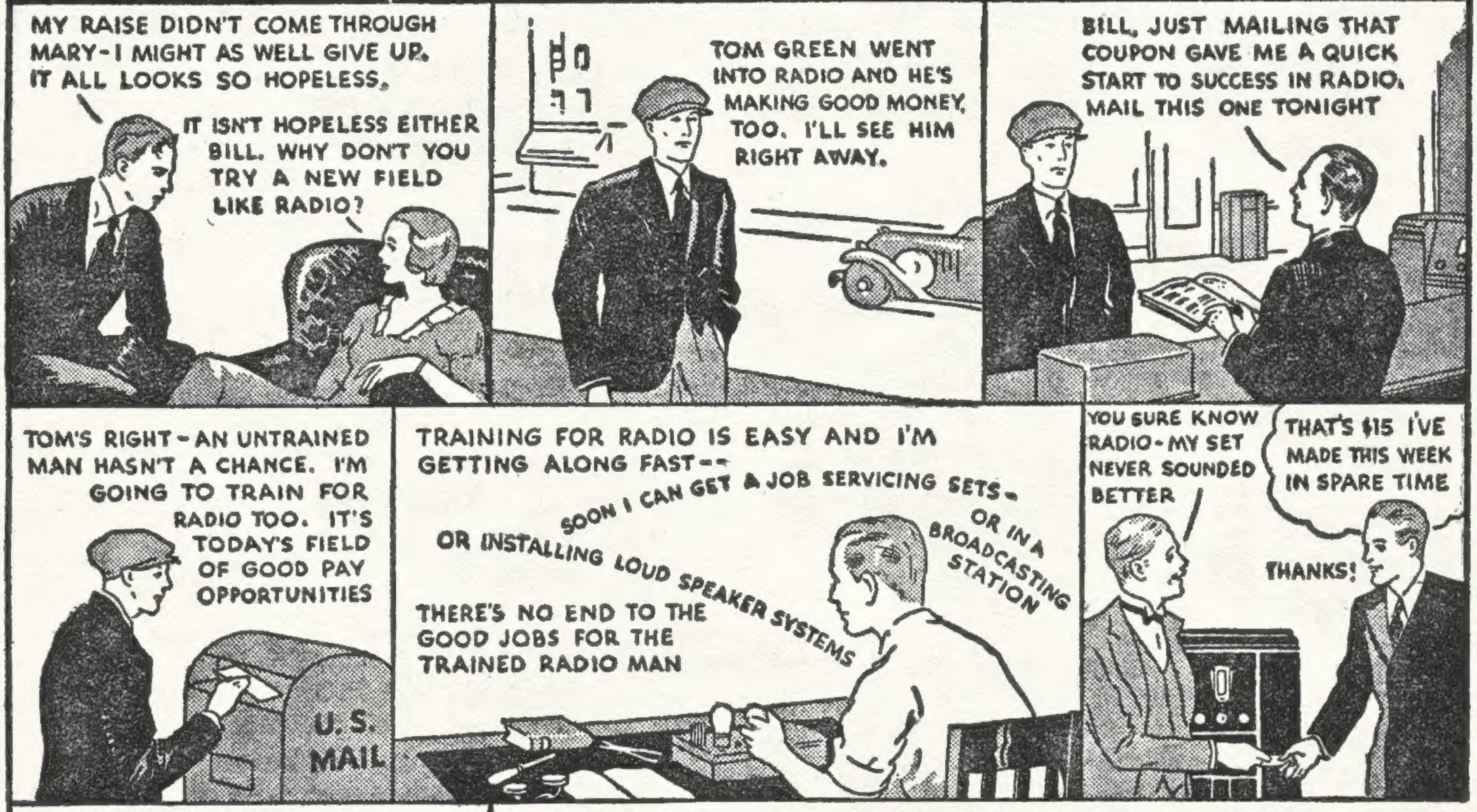
HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED-THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!


MY RAISE DIDN'T COME THROUGH MARY-I MIGHT AS WELL GIVE UP. IT ALL LOOKS SO HOPELESS.
IT ISN'T HOPELESS EITHER BILL. WHY DON'T YOU TRY A NEW FIELD LIKE RADIO?
TOM GREEN WENT INTO RADIO AND HE'S MAKING GOOD MONEY, TOO. I'LL SEE HIM RIGHT AWAY.
BILL, JUST MAILING THAT COUPON GAVE ME A QUICK START TO SUCCESS IN RADIO. MAIL THIS ONE TONIGHT
TOM'S RIGHT-AN UNTRAINED MAN HASN'T A CHANCE. I'M GOING TO TRAIN FOR RADIO TOO. IT'S TODAY'S FIELD OF GOOD PAY OPPORTUNITIES
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THERE'S NO END TO THE GOOD JOBS FOR THE TRAINED RADIO MAN
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THAT'S $15 I'VE MADE THIS WEEK IN SPARE TIME
THANKS!

I HAVE A GOOD FULL TIME RADIO JOB NOW--AND A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD IN RADIO
OH BILL, IT'S WONDERFUL YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO.

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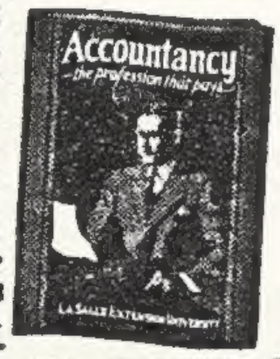

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LOST TRAILS

Any man who served with Ambulance Company No. 3, First Sanitary Train, First Division, A. E. F., write Archibald B. Oliver, 1747 Kentucky Street, Lawrence, Kansas.

Charles W. Cantrell, 8231 Germantown Ave., Philadelphia, wants word of Lieut. John Lewin and O'Neil Sievere.

Henry D. McGregor, 1708 Baker Avenue, Everett, Wash., wants to hear from an old shipmate, Gilford John Colvin, pharmacist's mate U.S.N. 1918-1919, later in Spokane, Wash.

Craig D. Hanson, who left Portland, Oregon, in 1935. Word wanted by G. P. Sylvester, 9535 S.E., Harold St., Portland, Oregon.

Where is Napier Mearns Crosett, his friend, J. Monte Dunstan, 51 South Beaver Street, York, Penn., queries.

Will "Sarge" Ralph Kingsley of Military Specialist Company, A.P.O. 727, write to "Kid" Collins Ewing, Odessa, Mo.

Captain Fred Ewing, Ex-Marine of Santa Domingo, please get in touch with Mrs. Sarah Olson of 2103 N.W., Hoyt St., Portland, Oregon, or Ethel Ewing, 136-19th St., E., Holland, Michigan.

Word wanted of Hamilton Redfield Norvell, sometimes called "Reddy" or "Curley," by his brother, Stevens Thompson Norvell, 4449 Howard Ave., Western Springs, Ill. Their father died on Dec. 30, 1936. Norvell lived in Cincinnati until 1932, went to Southern Ontario.

Otho Amos Duckwiler, formerly of Roanoke, Va., joined U.S. Army in 1914. Stationed Texas City, Texas, in 1914. Transferred to Field Artillery, stationed Canal Zone 1918, 1919. His sister has died, and her daughter, Virginia Pulewich, 10 East 109 St., New York City, wants to hear from him.

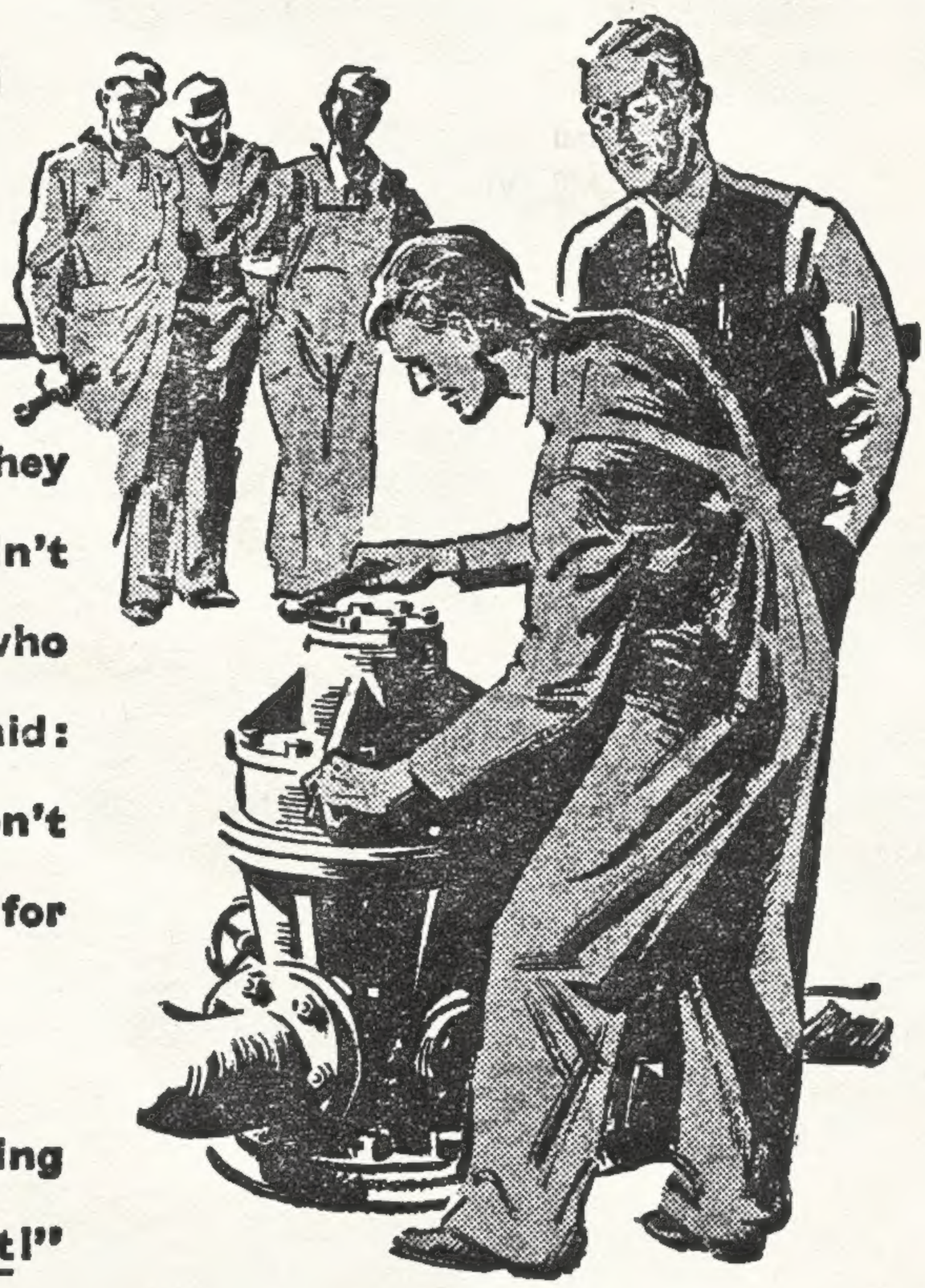
Wm. P. Liebenrood, who worked on construction of Madera-Mamore Railway, last heard from at Puerto Veljo, Brazil, in 1914, believed leaving there for Cuba—please send word to G. C. Hagerman, 700 South Kingsley Drive, Los Angeles.

Mrs. Beatrice Stafford Grigsby, Box 203, Paintsville, Ky., wants word of her son, Jesse John Stafford Franklin, worked in Akron, Ohio, as John Stafford, for Goodyear Rubber Co., last heard of ten years ago.

Word wanted of Calvin William (Slim) Brown, once of Ranger, Texas. By Isaac Simmons, Bloom, Kansas.

Ralph Cornwall or Cornwell, formerly of "American Legion" in Canadian Army, transferred overseas to Intelligence service, reported caught in Germany and shot. Lately reported living in Texas or Oklahoma. Old buddy, Wayne G. Putnam, R.R. 3, Dayton, Ohio, would like word.

"My reputation as a trouble-shooter won a promotion for me"



"When something went wrong they called on me. The truth is, I didn't realize it until one day the boss, who happened to be looking on, said: 'The boys always call on you, don't they? You are in direct line for promotion.'"

●

"P.S. The boss knew I was taking an I.C.S. Course. We both knew it!"

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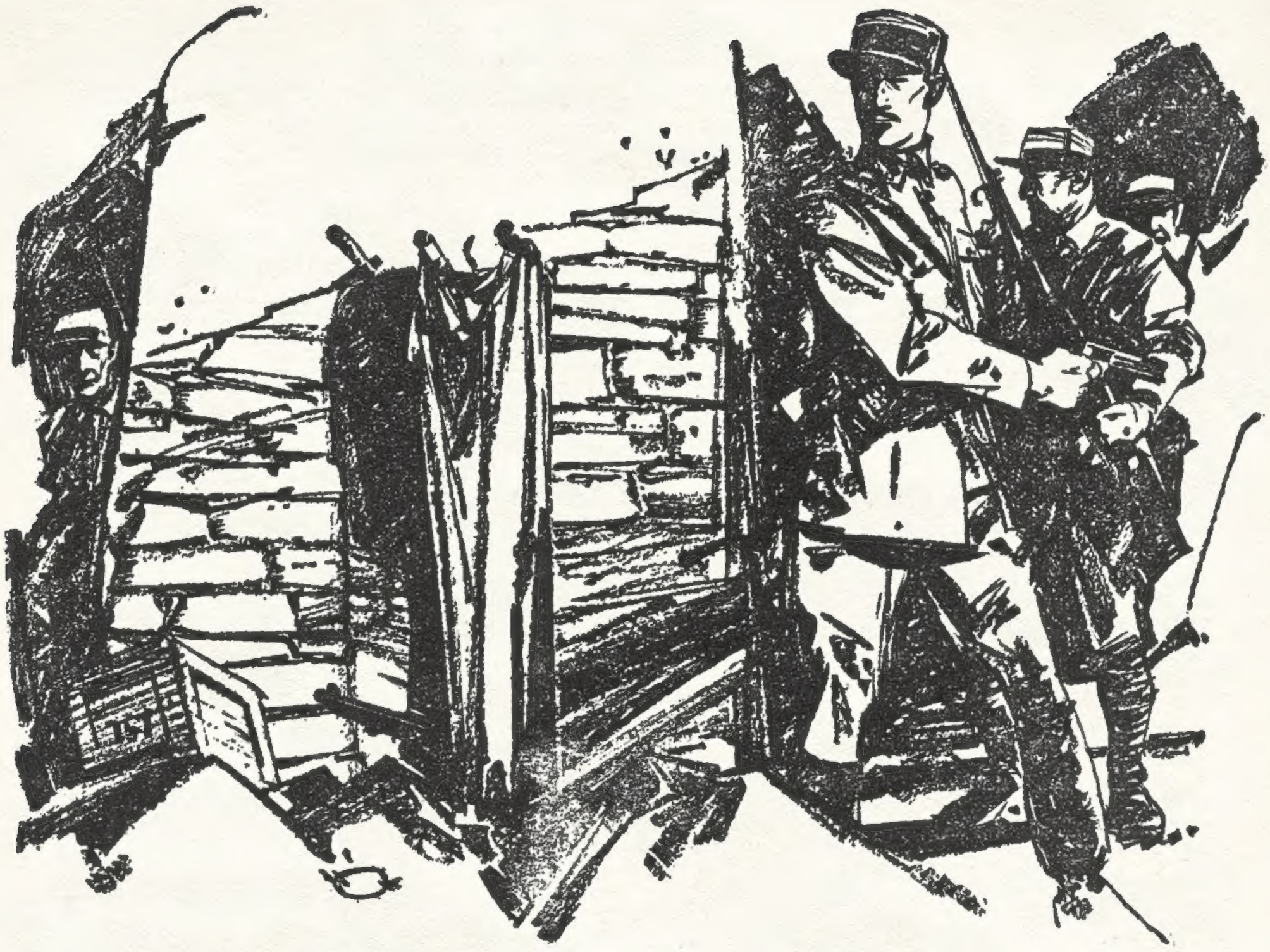

We could hear them gathering in numbers . . .

GENTLEMEN PAY

A novelette

By GEORGES SURDEZ

DUSK.

Within a few minutes, the swift Moroccan twilight would be over. Every Legionnaire in the first company knew that it would be best to settle matters before complete darkness. For in the night, discipline and organization lost some effectiveness, one man was worth another, and a club and a knife were equal to gun and bayonet.

The range had shortened, so that the bullets did not come singing at the end of a curve but lashed and cracked horizontally. At the whistle, the sweating, weary men in khaki halted for a breathing pause, some stretched out, others kneeling. They eased the tormenting straps, the burden of pack, cartridge-pouches, canteens and bags. Then, with a clopping of heavy boots, a clatter of equipment, the third section pounded up to the skirmish line, swung like a pendulum from left to right, filled a gap in the front.

"Eh, Lessinger!" A derisive voice fused from one of the groups of shadows to the side, which was the second section: "Did you get that shoe lace tied?"

The big sergeant commanding the first group wiped perspiration from cheeks and chin with his hard, grimy palm. The question irritated him, and he peered through the poor light to identify the man who had called. But what was the use? What could he say? Lessinger knew better than that joker that his section

was lagging today. Something was wrong. What?

Nothing that he could see or think of. Nothing to fret about now. The easy incline stretching ahead, with its indistinct patches of bushes, its looming masses of boulders, offered enough trouble. Sidi Raho's mountain warriors were still there. The shots were beginning to show in the murk, brief, tiny explosions of orange-hued flames, like enormous, thunderous fireflies. Evening, almost—and since dawn, twenty-five miles and five hours of fighting!

Other men were trotting up from the rear, dark silhouettes against the sky. Packages of cartridges were tossed into outstretched hands. Then somebody shouted, asking if any water had been brought up, and someone else replied, wondering if the other's feet were dirty. Despite the slashing fire, the halt had brought a moment of comparative peace.

The panorama of hills and ravines, the crests outlined against the fading red of the sky, multicolored streamers of smoke, green and yellow, creeping about to denote the emplacements of the units engaged to the artillery observers, formed a spectacular vision. And the blooming of shrapnels to the rear of the dissident forces was a pretty sight, too.

"Lieutenant d'Hervier, Lieutenant d'Hervier!"

Lessinger recognized a runner from the captain's liaison group.

"Further left, Sleben, further left," he advised him.

"Thanks, Sergeant."

In the sky, the lingering red was shredding, masses disintegrating as if blown away by the rising wind. Lessinger, following the runner with his glance, saw him turn away from the line, to meet the officer's tall, slender form that seemed to rise from the earth.

"Dirty afternoon, eh?"

"Hello, Porchon—" Lessinger turned to see a comrade, in charge of a group of the second section, standing nearby. "Anything new?"

"Nothing." Porchon worked a lighter

for a cigarette. "I hear the fourth got two killed. Names didn't come through yet. Say, the Old Man's wild. I was near him when a battalion runner came up and told him that the other companies and one of native infantry had reached their objectives. He likes to be there first, you know."

"I suppose the third section's to blame," Lessinger conceded sourly. "But listen, we had to go through—"

"Save it—save it—"

Porchon strolled back to his formation, as if careless of the whipping bullets. Naturally, most of the shots were aimed at the spot where he had struck a light—clever fellow!

There was something that Lessinger had been thinking of before the sergeant had spoken. He remembered: why was Lieutenant d'Hervier ten yards behind the line, when he ordinarily was with it?

HE had never shared the captain's partiality for the officer, nor the men's devotion. D'Hervier was a brave man, admittedly, and had performed well. But Lessinger always had sensed a weak streak in him—perhaps because he was so handsome, so polished, so much of a school officer.

"I'm crazy," Lessinger thought. "I thought the guy was swell until a minute ago. Should be with the line, though." Then he laughed. "As if thirty feet made any difference to a bullet meant for you!"

The whistle. . . .

The four sections heaved upright and loped ahead, gathering speed. The men dragged their tired muscles into play, tramped on. The elation of the first advance, early in the afternoon, was gone; there was nothing left for them but a wearying, dangerous task, the brushing back of the stragglers still hanging on. The fixed bayonets stirred, pale streaks of metal against the gathering gray.

"Third section, come on, come on—"

Again Lessinger had that sensation of dragging, felt the weight of the men behind him as definitely as if they had been fastened to him by cords. The flankers of the section on the right had vanished ahead.

There were sounds of struggle; dim groups could be seen forming, tussling, melting into single racing figures ahead. He heard the voices of the other sergeants, urging, pleading.

A form spread on the ground. Lessinger hurdled it—it was a corpse, the body of a native. Only scattered shots cracked immediately before him; right and left, the other sections were doing the work—

For a few seconds, a man ran at his elbow, his colleague, Sergeant Maroneti. "Where's the lieutenant?"

"Search me. Around somewhere."

"Think they'll stick it?"

"Don't you?"

An eddy of running men separated them. Lessinger's voice gathered his men as they neared the enemy. Yellow and blue flames smashed out of the semi-darkness, where hand-grenades were thrown. And suddenly the natives were very near, racing out of the dark.

A series of collisions, spurting oaths, the smash of solid objects on flesh, the unmistakable squash of a skull under a butt. If the approach had been achieved in the full light, this would not have happened, Lessinger thought. Men hold better when they cannot see the full sweep of an advancing line.

He hung back a step, balancing his automatic in the right fist, rifle held high in the left hand. Silhouettes whirled up to him, dodged, vanished. Oftenest, he recognized the rigid line of the képi's vizor. When the outline of the skull was round, unbroken, he took a chance and fired.

Lessinger did not know the combat as a whole—it was a succession of flitting, indistinct pictures, of excited episodes. And he was still standing, looking for

danger, when the words were passed along:

"Unbuckle your tools—start digging—"

The shots had ceased almost completely. The men were digging, as ordered, and the non-coms were consulting one another as to the exact line—whether to follow the crest they had reached, or dig further down the hill. And, in the obscurity, a man shoved his way among the toiling Legionnaires.

"Lieutenant d'Hervier, Lieutenant—"

Lessinger shrugged and thought: "That's right. Where's that bird?"

"Here," called a voice. The officer was quite near. Lessinger could not ignore the brief exchange.

"The captain wants to see you at once, Lieutenant."

"In a moment—"

"He said 'at the gallop,' Lieutenant."

"All right, all right. Inform the captain that I am injured, but will come immediately." And, as the orderly moved away, the officer's voice cried: "Lessinger—Sergeant Lessinger."

"Present, *mon lieutenant.*"

"Know anything of our situation? Casualties?"

"I understand there are three, Lieutenant. Three this last lap. That makes five." Lessinger squatted, lighted his plan with a pocket-flashlight. "Our line goes from here—to here."

"In case the captain asks me—" D'Hervier's voice was odd, strained: "Struck in the knee, had a bad fall. Bruised my leg—"

Lessinger swung the light, saw the lieutenant's finger indicating the left knee. The sergeant touched the spot gingerly. No blood. A closer examination revealed that the cloth of the trousers was not torn.

"No wound, Lieutenant."

"Painful as the devil, though." D'Hervier hoisted himself erect. "I'll try to go and see the captain. Take over." And he limped away.

Lessinger straightened his massive body. He was physically tired, and felt an immense moral weariness. Five men had dropped on the way up. Five wounded—probably one or two would die.

And here was D'Hervier, a lieutenant, acting heroic over walking with a stone-bruise on one knee!

"COME here a moment," Maroneti said. He whispered: "d'Hervier is washed-up, I think." He explained: "You couldn't see, but my group was right near him all the time. He's lost his nerve or something—anyway, he has no stomach for fighting. You should have seen him fake that fall!"

"Better be careful what you say," Lessinger advised.

"Oh, sure: Lieutenant, four citations in a year! But watch my word, old man, he's cracking. He played as safe all day as he dared. Don't kid yourself: The men are wise. They started hanging back for him to catch up, inside of an hour."

Lessinger shrugged. This was the explanation of what he had felt, the motivating for that sagging of the section. In the Legion, an officer does not merely command his men, he must lead them.

"Maybe the captain should be tipped off," he suggested.

"The captain? He was wise before I was. What do you think he sent for him for? At the last pause, he had a runner come over and ask d'Hervier to please keep up with the rest of the company. That's as far as he dared go by messenger, you see."

A few moments later, the lieutenant returned with Captain Sargel. The company commander's short, thick-set figure seemed to bring comfort to the men. He walked along the shallow trench, exchanged a few words with old Legionnaires. Then he halted before a group of non-coms.

"We got nosed out by the *bicos* and the other companies of our battalion," he announced. "I'm not used to that."

"Neither are we, Captain," Maroneti replied.

"I hope it doesn't become a habit." Sargel coughed, cleared his throat. "Well, all of us have off-days. Lieutenant, take care of your injury, so you'll be able to carry on in the morning."

"I shall, Captain."

The chief walked away in the light drizzle that had started a few minutes before.

D'Hervier gave a few instructions, then retired to his sleeping-sack, down at the end of the trench. Maroneti, who liked him least, was the first to comment.

"Did you get that crack the Old Man made? About his keeping fit to do his job?"

"Well," Lessinger replied, "he's sore. He didn't pay us any compliments, either. Forget it."

But he could not take his own advice, and did not forget it. When he turned out in the morning, his first glance was for d'Hervier, who was returning from down the hill. The lieutenant still limped, but as he stepped down from a high stone, he braced his weight on the wrong leg. Lessinger could not have been more startled had he seen a snake.

"He's faking, all right. But why?"

What was puzzling was that until yesterday's action, d'Hervier had shown courage and spirit. Even now, it was difficult to look at him and imagine him a coward. Not extremely tall, about five feet ten inches, he was trim and compact, with the agility of a fencer. His face, although perhaps over handsome, smooth, dark, with fine features, was resolute. And the steady, greenish eyes were not those of a timid man.

Yet his first question denoted nervousness.

"Do you think we'll attack today?"

"Eh?" The sergeant was startled. "No, not likely, Lieutenant." He indicated the valley below, the ridge at the other end. "They'll hold over there, awaiting reinforcements. There was just enough rain last night to bog our artillery." He turned, lifted his hand again. The slopes behind them, across which they had charged the day before, was wet and long convoys of carts plodded over it. "Taking their time. If an attack was due this afternoon, they'd have us out building roads for that stuff."

"You're right." D'Hervier appeared relieved. "Say, Lessinger, how long have you been in the Legion?"

"Seven years and six months, Lieutenant."

"Lessinger—" The officer hesitated, appeared at a loss for words. "You must have been up against all sorts of problems, eh? You understand, when something personal sort of annoys you in your duty?"

"No, Lieutenant." Lessinger was very straight. "I never thought of personal problems when in the field."

D'Hervier was perturbed, worried. Then he laughed and gripped Lessinger's arm. "Wish I was like you. Lucky fellow. Not a care in the world!"

He walked away.

Not a care? Lessinger was worrying. He felt that d'Hervier had held out his hand for help only to be turned away. But what would be the purpose of accepting confidences, of soliciting them? There was nothing any man could do when a comrade was caught between duty and a personal problem.

How old was d'Hervier? Twenty-three, twenty-four at the most!

LESSINGER reviewed what he knew about him. D'Hervier had come to the Legion two years before, a sub-lieutenant not long out of school, had joined the first company fourteen months ago. It was known that he had a large private income, would inherit a

title, that he had no need to be in the army. His mounts, orderlies and uniforms cost him more than his lieutenant's pay. Captain Sargel and his other superiors considered him a fine prospect.

What was sure was that d'Hervier, until recently, had enjoyed danger and hardships. His inclination to consider his existence a sort of prolonged game, a fine sport, had irritated some of the men. But he had gone on leave to France, just before the start of this expedition. Perhaps something had happened there. As Lessinger had heard an officer state once: "Young men should not be permitted leave. Plunged back into civic surroundings, they lose military worth."

Against that was a solid argument: Ten days ago, in the opening combat, d'Hervier had shown gallantry, extreme courage. He had taken his combat groups forward so rapidly that the captain had chided him, smilingly: "Look here, d'Hervier, leave something for the rest of us to do. Don't be a hog."

Ten days ago—the change had come inside ten days. What had happened since? Nothing of importance, except—the lieutenant had changed orderlies, dismissed Legionnaire Sierck, who was back in the ranks, and taken on a young fellow nineteen years old. But there had been reasons for this: Sierck was an old soldier, a fine valet when sober, but too seldom sober.

Nevertheless, this was an angle. Lessinger located Sierck. The man was in shirt-sleeves, digging a sanitary ditch. At least forty years old, with a wrinkled face and a network of tiny red veins in his big nose. He followed the sergeant aside. Lessinger rested a massive hand on his shoulder.

"Let's make it short. Why did the Lieutenant sack you?"

"Because I get drunk, Sergeant." Sierck's eyes wavered: "Well, because something was missing. Oh, nothing worth much. I'm no thief. Some paper or other. He thinks—well, I shouldn't say it, I guess, but he thinks I sold it."

"To whom does he think you sold it?" Lessinger's fingers tightened in persuasive pressure. He knew that Sierck, brave enough in action, was afraid of a beating.

"To Sergeant Albercu."

"All right." Lessinger released the Legionnaire, walked away.

Albercu, Sergeant Albercu! There was no use in trying to obtain information from that fellow. Few men liked Albercu, but all granted that he was courageous, and all conceded that he was exceptionally intelligent. But there were disquieting rumors about him: He was extraordinarily conceited, very ambitious. He liked to parade fine uniforms, to spend money. He was in debt with tailors, with bootmakers, with innkeepers. He owed every sergeant in the company, including Lessinger.

Captain Sargel did not like him, had refused twice to put him on the list for a commission-school. Rightly, probably, because Albercu had been in hot water twice when he had had the handling of army funds.

When the non-commissioned men gathered for lunch, Lessinger paid more attention than usual to Albercu. The man was tall, lean, with the sort of good looks that captivate women and irritate men—a soft, red mouth, soft brown eyes with long lashes, hair as smooth and glistening as patent-leather. He wore an identity plaque of gold, on a large link-bracelet of the same metal. His melodious voice, alluring French with his Rumanian accent, was heard often.

"Rotten chow," he commented. "I bet the troopers fare better."

The sergeant in charge of the mess for that month, Freundstein, resented the remark. "That's issue beef. Where would you get anything else? Yesterday, you kicked about tinned meat. I'd like roast duck myself, and a rum omelette after." He shrugged: "Always the same, those who don't pay kick the most."

"Beg pardon?" Albercu asked haughtily.

"You're two months in arrears and you know it."

"Why, no—two months?" Albercu produced a wallet from his inside pocket, flipped it open, counted four crisp bills: "Here you are. But next time, you might speak to me in private."

The other sergeants stared at each other. It was no secret that Albercu had started the campaign broke, because a Meknes caterer had gone to the captain about his bill and the Rumanian sergeant had been ordered to pay in full. No pay had been distributed since, yet Albercu had at least one thousand francs in that wallet!

"You must loot corpses," Maroneti suggested. And all laughed. Except for rifle and ammunition, no Moroccan had anything worth taking, garments and sandals, amulets or scarf, seldom representing much more than a few francs in value. And finding money on a dead Legionnaire, in the Middle Atlas, would have been phenomenal.

"I received a money-order," Albercu explained shortly.

Lessinger, watching him closely, thought that the Rumanian did not like the questions and was sorry that he had yielded to his desire to make a public gesture.

CHAPTER II

"AS LONG AS DEATH . . ."

THREE days later, the mobile group camped on a plateau to await supplies and replacements. The Moroccans had received reinforcements from other tribes, and had stopped retreating. While the colonel commanding had enough men to batter his way through, he preferred to play the game safely, avoiding heavy losses.

The first company had been engaged in action twice, but for very brief periods, as the hill people had not held their positions. Although there was very little talk about it, all knew that something was wrong, that the formerly close friendship between the officers was badly shaken. Orderlies who served at the battalion's mess reported that Sargel seldom spoke to d'Hervier and that the sub-lieutenant, Bourlay, avoided his colleague.

D'Hervier was evidently very nervous. And those under his orders suffered. Lessinger knew that he was rattled, in prey to some private grief. But that did not excuse the lieutenant for breaking into a storm of petty scolding on slight provocation.

"Lessinger, I have told you a thousand times, when an automatic is taken apart, I want the parts on a canvas or a blanket. I've just seen one of your gunners laying parts on the ground—"

A direct observation to the gunner would have done more good. Several days dragged by, and the expected supplies did not arrive, although reported on the way. The advanced posts kept contact with the enemy, their machine-guns could be heard stuttering in brief, warning bursts throughout the nights.

Patrols went out often during the dark hours, to probe the mountaineers' positions, to add precious details to the maps and photographs supplied by the aviation. Lessinger led two such ventures, returning from the second with one of his men, Sierck, fatally wounded. But the Legionnaire died without saying a word, less than two hours after reaching the ambulance.

And it was the following day that rumors of a terrible scene between the captain and d'Hervier seeped through the entire camp. Even officers were prompt to forget that canvas does not form a soundproof barrier to voices.

"If d'Hervier shot himself, I wouldn't be surprised," Sergeant Maroneti stated grimly. "I wouldn't go on living if the

Old Man called me what he called him."

Lessinger learned the complete story: The patrol which he had led the preceding evening, upon order from d'Hervier, had been presumed to be led by the lieutenant in person. At the officers' council, the colonel had asked which company was due to supply a patrol, and several young lieutenants had volunteered immediately to step in out of turn. Such a patrol was an adventure, offered opportunity for personal distinction.

'My company's due," Sargel had declared. Bourlay had nodded, but d'Hervier had not uttered a word.

And when the shooting had started in the remote darkness, when a scouting band of natives had stumbled upon the Legion patrol by accident, the captain had come to the defensive trench, there to find d'Hervier peering into the night like himself.

"I'd like to speak to you for a moment," Sargel had barked.

The two had vanished into the captain's tent, and for a while, those who listened had heard nothing. Then Sargel's voice had risen, to a roar at times:

"And I'm telling you that if anything happens to Lessinger, I'll have you court-martialed. Do you hear me, court-martialed! Have you lost your nerve? Are you afraid?"

"I'm not afraid, Captain!" D'Hervier's tone had been loud also.

A continued murmur had followed for some minutes, before Sargel exploded once more: "That's out of the question! An officer in my company cannot ask leave of absence when on a campaign! Are you trying to make a monkey out of me? I won't have you go to the doctor like a malingering private! There's nothing wrong with you. Nothing wrong except with your courage. I believed you to be a man; I've committed myself on you more than I ever have done for any other subordinate. And what happens? This!"

"I have explained, Captain, why—"

"Suppose everyone reasoned as you do? I am as fond of ladies as you can be, as much of a gentleman, I hope! But when with my company, I forget them. I am a married man, I have children. Does that keep me from doing my duty? No! The welfare of the Queen of England would not count compared to a single one of my men—"

D'Hervier had emerged and walked about for the rest of the night. When Lessinger saw him, in the pale light of dawn, he was haggard, unshaven, his eyes red and heavy with lack of sleep. His hands quivered, and when the wounded Sierck was lifted onto a stretcher, when the blood from the abdominal wound dripped through the cloth and trailed on the ground, he seemed about to faint.

"It's horrible, Lessinger, horrible!"

"It's the luck of the game, Lieutenant. He was looking for a citation, I suppose, because he leaped ahead of me when the shooting started."

"Ahead of you? Where I should have been." D'Hervier smiled, and went away.

THAT afternoon, Lessinger went to the captain's tent to turn in his report, which had been approved by d'Hervier. He found the lieutenant already there, and while Sargel was scanning his scrawled pages describing the incidents of the patrol, Bourlay arrived. His nod toward d'Hervier was a poem, an acknowledgement of his presence but a denial of his existence!

"Good report, Lessinger," the captain approved. He picked up several small pieces of paper, on which Lessinger recognized the lieutenant's writing, and murmured as he read: "Lessinger . . . sergeant . . . energy and courage . . . " He picked up his pen, struck out the word 'courage' and replaced it with 'bravery'. "All right. Now—Sierck, Anton-Karl . . . "

It was Sierck's posthumous citation. The Legionnaire had won both crosses at the same time, one of bronze, one of wood. Sargel scanned the third, looked up at d'Hervier.

"My good friend, what's the idea of this?"

"Captain?" d'Hervier stepped forward. "This citation for Sergeant Albercu? Granting that it should exist at all, it is at least a week late. And, unless I am mistaken, this non-commissioned officer is not in your section."

"He's in mine, Captain," Bourlay stated.

"Ah? Bourlay, did Albercu distinguish himself the other day?"

"Well—" The sub-lieutenant cast a brief glance at his comrade. "He did his job like the rest. I mean, he advanced *with the line*."

"Any motivating for this citation?"

"Not in my opinion, Captain."

"Now, Lieutenant—" Sargel broke off, as Lessinger stirred to remind him of his presence: "All right, Sergeant, you may leave."

Lessinger obeyed. He was glad to depart, for he did not want to witness d'Hervier's further humiliation. The lieutenant seemed to act like a madman, dodging danger, citing a sergeant unpopular with the captain. But somewhere, somehow, the various threads must come together with an appearance of logic. Lessinger spoke to Maroneti about coaxing the truth from Albercu, who was wielding some unknown power over their chief.

"Two of a kind," the Corsican cut him short. "Albercu has some hold on d'Hervier. But whose fault is it? You remember when Albercu was courting some jane in Meknes, and the lieutenant rode him so hard, stopped his leaves? Albercu always swore he'd get even, because d'Hervier was trying to cut him out. If that was true, it was a dirty trick. An officer has too many advantages."

Lessinger shrugged, laughed shortly.

"I know, the lady in the Grand Hotel? Albercu was going around with her Breton maid—which was no game for d'Hervier. Albercu is boasting, that's all. Perhaps we should do something—"

Maroneti looked at Lessinger steadily.

"Albercu is poison to fool with. Unless you want a nasty comeback sometime, there's only one thing to do." He lifted his shoulders, grinned. "I'll help do that. Otherwise, count me out. It's simpler to kill a snake than it is to draw its fangs."

"I wouldn't go so far—"

"Then take my advice and drop it."

Maroneti was right: half-measures were foolish in dealing with a man such as Albercu. His hatred was too tenacious, too sure to be harmful, to trifle with. The matter was wiped from Lessinger's mind by an incident.

News spread through the camp that a fatigue party of *Tirailleurs*, out gathering wood, had been ambushed and decimated.

All had heard the shots, but as there was constant firing at the advanced posts, no one had paid much attention. Six or seven killed, three wounded, that was the score. Moreover, the natives had taken an automatic rifle and its ammunition.

That last item of news was the most important to the Legionnaires. The killed were out of trouble, the wounded were in the hospital. But that automatic rifle held a threat. Probably, the natives would not use it, strip the bands of cartridges to use them singly in rifles. Nevertheless, there was a chance that during the next attack, that gun would come into play—and surely against the Legion, most feared by the mountaineers.

An automatic is a toy that can quite well drop a dozen men in a few seconds, if not revealed too soon. Being normally intelligent, Legionnaires liked to keep at the butt end of such weapons.

SHORTLY before the afternoon meal, d'Hervier took Lessinger aside, offered him a cigarette.

"As you undoubtedly realize, Lessinger," he started, "I am in a mess. It's getting no better rapidly, too. I've tried to crawl out of it in one way and another, but nothing works. Have I ever done you a particular favor?"

"Nothing special, no, Lieutenant," the sergeant replied frankly.

"So that you are under no obligation. I am speaking to you man to man. I've tried to give the captain a hint of what I am up against, but as he is concerned —distantly, that's true—with the people involved, I can't state facts, nor give names. Needless to ask you for discretion—"

"You have my word, Lieutenant."

"Well, here is what happened: You know I went on leave before the campaign started. Coming back on the steamer, from Marseilles to Casablanca, I find that the captain's niece is aboard. She is coming out to get married." D'Hervier gave the name of her fiance, and Lessinger nodded: He had read about it in the papers. An important political figure in Morocco.

"She's a pretty woman, smart, a good dancer. You know, that marriage was an arranged thing; she was not madly in love with the fellow. You're a man, Lessinger, you know what went on—"

"Oh, sure!"

"A shipboard flirtation, that was all. Dancing, strolling the decks in the moonlight, holding hands, a couple of kisses. Nothing more, Lessinger, I swear it—"

"All right. What's the difference?" Lessinger wondered.

"Just the same, I feel a bit guilty about it. She's the captain's niece and her guardian trusts me because I am in his company. You know the rule about playing around with the women connected with chaps in your own regiment? It isn't done. She seems to feel the same way, and asks me to keep away from her when we land. I see her fiance from a distance. He's much older, short, fat, bald—but he has dough, influence, and a great career ahead of him when he succeeds in shaking away from the Colonies.

"I must have looked good to her by contrast," d'Hervier went on, without the least conceit in his tone, "because when I go around for a polite call with the captain, I can see that she is trying to get me aside. I know what she wants to talk about, I've seen that look before on other women. So I duck a private talk.

"To start with, I haven't enough to match what the fellow has to offer in the way of security. Then my family would raise hell. You understand, a lot of nonsense about birth, social standing—but most of all, I don't love her. I am sorry, of course, that I flirted with her, but you know how—"

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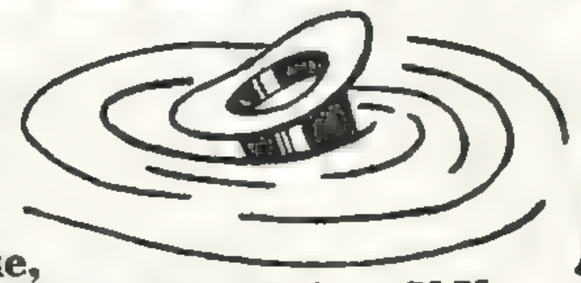

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"Sure, Lieutenant. No one could blame you."

"We're already in Kasbah when I get a letter from her. She is to be married in a couple of days, and has changed her mind. From the way that letter reads, you might think anything, everything. There's nine sheets, both sides, all crazy. I must get leave, I must wire her at once, I'm hers, she's mine! She will run away and join me, under the very knives of the Chleuhs!

"Here and there are some paragraphs of description about her husband which would be meat and gravy to his political opponents. I read it a couple of times, and I feel sorry for her, in a way, because she doesn't have the proper sentiments for a bride. But I know her well enough to be aware that she will have changed her mind again before long.

"And what can I do about it? Start a worse mess? I'm under twenty-five and need family consent for a marriage contract, you must remember. And I am not in love with her, I must repeat. Still, I can't bring myself to wire her a polite refusal. I'll answer, but I'll answer too late. Something to the effect that I received the letter after I read the news of her marriage, that I shall be eternally sorry, and so on. A small courtesy, you understand? A gentleman has to do such things.

"So I lock the letter in my trunk. Olga is married, as I learn from the captain when he comes back from special leave. He says it was a fine wedding! And I know that there's a letter somewhere with enough dynamite in it to blow up that marriage.

"That guy, her husband, is a smart man with a ruthless streak. He hates to be ridiculed. And he has a lot of power in the Government. To start with, he'd find some way of divorcing her without giving her a *sou*. It would ruin her family socially. Then he'd have it in for me and for the captain. He couldn't do much to me, because of my connections in the army. But the captain is a self-made man, as you know, hoisted himself from the ranks, and it would be easy to wreck his career.

"I CAN'T let that happen. I must locate the letter. I finally call in Sierck, who was my orderly then. The poor slob is drunk, can hardly stand up. At first, he swears he didn't touch a thing, then he admits that Albercu paid him twenty-five francs to obtain a letter from my trunk, a letter mailed from Meknes, of recent date. I gave the poor devil a few cuffs, sacked him. I thought that Albercu, naturally, had realized his mistake.

"But he didn't bring back the letter. I sent for him and asked him why he was interested in my correspondence. He had the cheek to tell me that he thought his girl was writing to me! All the evidence he had was that I frequented the Grand Hotel, where his girl was employed! I couldn't even recall seeing her. I assure him of this, explain that I had punished him for slips in duty, not to keep him out of circulation —and I suggest he give me back my letter.

"He agrees, but says: 'It will cost you ten thousand francs.'

"I ask why he is turning blackmailer. He explains that as I have just told him, I am a gentleman and could not have been interested in his girl. 'Gentlemen,' he concludes, 'always pay.'

"At that, I'm not too surprised. Out of the thousands of sergeants in the Legion, it is normal that one should be a skunk. It's just my bad luck to encounter that one. Now, I don't carry ten thousand francs in my pockets in the field, and he will not take a check, which shows he has experience. So, I gave him an account of two thousand. Just lately, I handed him another thousand.

"I have written for the balance, but

"There won't be much of you left when you land."

you know how the mails have dragged! I don't dare borrow, without explanations, as my colleagues are short of ready cash out here. When I hand him that last money, I suggest that he had better give me the letter, as I may be killed. So he says: 'Oh, Lieutenant, that would be all right! If anything happens to you, the lady will be glad to pay.'

"I tried to compromise, even promised him a citation when he asked for it. But he keeps the letter. You know what he is like, pretentious, heartless, cheap. I was afraid something would happen to me, and leave her exposed to blackmail. She is rich, now, and she is a woman. Yet, if only the two of us were involved, I wouldn't be so worried. But the guy would avenge himself on everyone connected with her, which includes the captain.

"It's an odd situation, isn't it?"

"It certainly is, Lieutenant!" Lessinger nodded. "Now, what do you wish me to do? Get Albercu to surrender that letter?"

"While I am alive, that's my concern. But I'd like you to see that he doesn't keep it for further use when—if anything happens to me. Could you do it quietly? Without anyone else knowing what the letter was?"

"He has it with him, Lieutenant?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll get it, don't worry. You have friends here, Lieutenant, friends who won't ask questions. Especially if—" Lessinger faltered.

"If it's a pious duty, eh?" d'Hervier laughed.

"You're not going to try to—"

D'Hervier grew serious. Lessinger liked the set of his face; he recognized him now as the leader he had known.

"Both the captain and Bourlay have used words to me that I would like to forget. According to appearances, they were right. Still, although I've been good at very few things in my life, Lessinger, I am a damn good soldier. Just the same—" He grinned, as if relieved—"Perhaps it would have been easier to elope with the girl and get married."

Lessinger laughed in his turn, a little sheepishly.

"I don't know, Lieutenant. Marriage doesn't last as long as death. But it hurts worse while it's going on."

CHAPTER III

LAST TESTAMENT

AFTER the reading of the evening report, the Legion battalion was not dismissed. The major, tall and gray-haired, a sort of musketeer in khaki, conversed with the captains; then the announcement was made.

Volunteers were asked for a special mission to be led by Lieutenant d'Hervier, of the first company. Each company would supply four privates and one sergeant, to be selected from the candidates by their respective captains. The danger would be considerable, but the service rendered the mobile group, the Army, France, the Legion, even greater.

Everybody was ready. Lessinger stepped forward with the others. But it was, in a way, a hypocritical move, for he knew he would not be selected. Captain Sagel looked at him, grinned with pleasure.

"Always willing, old fire-eater! Didn't you get enough last night? Maroneti, come here. How long have you been waiting for the medal?"

"Too long, Captain," Maroneti stood rigid.

"Good answer. As long as it's your hide you're risking, pick your own men. But not more than one from your group. We want this spread out a bit."

A few minutes later, the volunteers gathered for instructions, striding proudly, as men already set apart from others, men wearing the aura of impending death. There was no secrecy about the special mission.

Native spies kept by the intelligence service among the dissident tribes had reported during the afternoon, knowing that the French would be interested in the location of the lost automatic. Their stories conflicted—several sites along the line were given—but all were within a short distance, less than two miles.

Reasoning that regardless of future plans, the natives would not resist the temptation to use it at least once, the detachment under d'Hervier was to cross the valley, and seek to draw its fire. If successful, an attempt must be made to incapacitate it with grenades, if not, the position must be carefully checked so that the mountain artillery could beat the spot during the attack.

Lessinger understood that this was not strictly logical. Risking twenty lives to save a like number in the future appeared foolish. But there was the question of morale involved. The Chleuhs had taken the automatic, and it was a good principle to deprive them of it as soon as possible. Moreover, when large bodies of troops are immobilized, such undertakings keep up men's spirits.

At ten o'clock, the band of volunteers gathered at the defensive wall. Captain Sagel shook hands with d'Hervier, then impulsively gripped him in his arms, in a soldier's embrace.

"Lad, I have faith in you. For the rest, forgive me—"

"Not your fault, Captain. *Eh bien*, ready?"

"When you please, Lieutenant."

D'Hervier still waited, and Lessinger stepped forward close enough to be recognized in the darkness. The lieutenant would understand—that he could go in

peace, leaving matters in good hands.

"Let's go."

The twenty-one volunteers moved away, into the night, soundlessly. They wore light sandals; their equipment had been adjusted to avoid clatter. Captain Sagel caught Lessinger by the arm.

"What do you know about this business? You understand what I mean: The lieutenant, Albercu—" When the sergeant made an evasive answer, his chief grumbled: "I could have sworn he'd go to you. In any case, Lessinger, there goes probably the finest officer we've ever known, and he's feeling like a kicked dog! Are you religious, Lessinger?"

"At times, Captain."

"You get it." And Sagel vanished toward his tent.

But he was back at the wall when the muffled detonations sounded, when flickers of light sparkled in the distance. There was no thrill comparable to this listening, watching, in the darkness, for the game played was played with human lives. The first outburst quieted, there was another—and suddenly the distinct, rhythmical tapping of an automatic!

"They're using grenades now!"

The air was vibrating. Then all was still for a long moment. After that there were brief cracklings, which spread along the lines like a brush fire. A few light rockets streaked the sky, bloomed into intense, blue-white glare. Machine guns pounded from the outposts. Naturally, for the plain must be swarming with the aroused natives.

SLOWLY, silence returned, and the stars seemed to swing overhead, ticking away the minutes, the hours. It was almost dawn when the detachment came up from the valley. The men arrived in a confused group. Then a single figure detached itself, came toward Sagel.

"Sergeant Maroneti, in charge, Captain." The non-com came to attention, saluted: "Wish to report mission accomplished."

"Your officer?"

"We brought him back, Captain."

"Wounded?"

There was an imperceptible pause; then the Corsican's voice uttered the words, without emotion: "Dead, Captain."

After an instant of silence, Sagel spoke. His voice was steady.

"What happened?"

"Upon leaving the camp, Lieutenant

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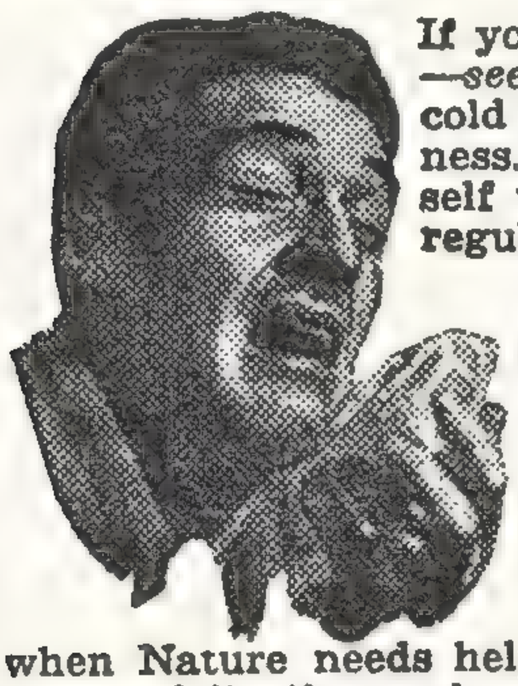

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THE ORIGINAL CHOCOLATED LAXATIVE

d'Hervier gathered us and informed us of his plan. If we succeeded in locating the automatic rifle, we were to undertake to capture it and bring it back. He said it was the only way to make sure we had attended to our business. That meant more danger, he said, so that he would take four volunteers, while the rest covered his rush.

"We tried a first emplacement, but it was only held lightly. A few prowlers hung on to us from then on, firing constantly as we progressed. We could hear them gathering in numbers. At the second emplacement, we were lucky. The automatic was there. They had dug a pit inside a stone hut, and were shooting through a loophole. At ground level, you understand.

"So we threw a few grenades, to make them believe that all we were after was destroying the automatic. Then the lieutenant, myself and three others went in. I believe it was there that the lieutenant was wounded the first time. Bringing the gun with us, we—"

"How many men with the gun, Sergeant?"

"I am not sure. Must have been six or seven. We were bumping into them everywhere for a while, Captain."

"Yes, go on."

"Outside, the lieutenant handed the gun to one of the men and told him to go ahead, with four men. I think he wanted to locate Legionnaire Pratz, who had not come out with us. But someone else said it was no use, that he had picked up Pratz's carbine, although he had not taken the time to take off the cartridges.

"So we started back. We kept bumping into groups of natives every few yards for a while, and they'd shoot right away, while we had to be careful because we did not want to shoot the fellows with the gun by mistake. We lost two men—from another company, so I don't know their names—but picked up their guns and ammunition all right.

"We were already halfway back when some slob pops up right in front of us. He had a revolver, which is unusual, and fired with that until he was done for. He must have hit the lieutenant, because he collapsed a few yards further. He said he had been hit low, and was bleeding a lot. He couldn't walk. He wanted to give me his gun and cartridges. I said no, I wouldn't leave him—what was the sense? We'd done the job and were on the way back, anyway, so he was no bother.

"He was awkward to carry, and we were hurting him. He said he'd sooner have us leave him. I don't know just when he died, but when we laid him down, at the outpost, he was dead."

Maroneti's voice trailed off wearily.

"Where's the automatic, Sergeant?" Sagel prompted.

"We left it down at the outpost, with the lieutenant, Captain. I thought it might look better if they were brought in together. You see, he had taken it himself."

"I see. You did a good job, Sergeant. You're entitled to your rest. You may leave." Sagel turned away. "Get a stretcher. I'm going down there—"

Lessinger walked beside Maroneti.

"I want to get a wash first," the Corsican said. "I'm covered with goo. D'Hervier was dripping on me for a kilometer. The kid was so game he made me want to bawl, I'm telling you. You should have seen him go in there—"

Outside the tent, in the gathering light. Maroneti stripped and scrubbed himself. And all the time, like a man suffering from shock, he spoke jerkily of his night's patrol. Little, meaningless details all jumbled together. Then he pulled a wool uniform out of his pack, started to dress.

"Aren't going to turn in?" Lessinger wondered.

"No. I'm going to have a couple of words with Albercu."

"You remember what you said?"

"Yes." Maroneti looked up. "That's what I intend to do." His voice broke. "He drove him to it, I'm telling you. I don't know how, but he drove him to it!"

"I know how," Lessinger stated. "And you'll let me handle it. What's the use of getting yourself into a mess?"

"Why should you be the—"

"D'Hervier's instructions, Maroneti."

Down the camp street came Sagel, bare-headed, walking beside a stretcher on which a body rested under a blanket.

"All right," the Corsican agreed.

DURING the funeral ceremonies that afternoon, Lessinger recalled d'Hervier's remark: That it might have been better, safer, for him to elope with the young girl. And it was odd to think that his family would now have consented to anything to have him back, while they would have just as certainly cast him out had he contracted a union beneath his social caste.

D'Hervier himself had been something of a snob. But he had paid for his standards with his life, and no one could ask for more.

"Lessinger," Captain Sagel told him, later, "you take over the third section. You're senior. You'll need a sergeant to take over your group. The major has nominated a few corporals for promotion. Who do you want?"

"Sergeant Albercu, Captain."

Sagel looked up at the big sergeant, and appeared about to refuse. Then, with a barely perceptible movement of one hand, he spoke.

"That can be arranged, Lessinger."

Albercu made no protest about the transfer. He was not very popular in his section, and Sub-Lieutenant Bourlay gave him all the unpleasant tasks that he could think of. Moreover, he believed that he could deceive the massive, slow-moving Lessinger at will.

As for Maroneti, he was jubilant.

"I get it, I get it," he repeated.

"Thought you would." Lessinger grinned. "We'll make it a private party."

Lessinger was not pressed for time. Albercu was too clever to do anything by correspondence. He would not approach Miss Olga Sagel-that-was until the return to Meknes.

The campaign resumed, a series of sharp engagements, at two or three days' intervals. And the extraordinary thing was that Albercu, who had blackmailed his officer into faking a citation for him, won one quite legitimately. The man was not a soldier by taste, but finding himself one, he made the best of it.

Some weeks elapsed. Mentions of d'Hervier at mess grew rarer. And the anecdotes told of him were not those of combat, but tales of his extravagance in Meknes, the amusing tales.

One afternoon, after the mobile group had camped, Captain Sagel gathered his section-commanders in his tent. A large staff map of the region was folded on the table.

"I'm afraid I've let us in for a job," he started. "You see here, on curve six-one-seven-seven, this needle of rock, shooting straight up? From the top, one is almost on the same level as across the valley. But the range is too long for rifles. At the conference, a while ago, I suggested getting a thirty-seven millimeter cannon up there.

"The commander turned to the major in charge of the artillery, who said he had noted the spot himself, but from all reports, it would be impossible to get even such a small piece up there. He added, grinning at me, that perhaps Legionnaires could do it, but that he and his gunners were merely human beings. I asked if the climb was possible for men, and I was told yes, possible but difficult. And retreat was out of the question, which was why the mountaineers did not occupy it—three hundred

and fifty-odd feet steep on their side!"

His listeners looked at each other, smiling. They knew what was coming.

"So I said that if men could climb it, my Legionnaires would get, not a thirty-seven, but a seventy-five up there. And the colonel laughed, suggested splitting the difference: He'd be satisfied if we got a sixty-five millimeter mountain cannon on that peak. Not essential to our success, he added, but a good sporting proposition."

"I'd like to take a cut on the bet," Lieutenant Bourlay said.

"Who mentioned a bet?" the captain challenged. "We'll speak of that later. Now, what we need is not ordinary courage. There will be little danger after the top is reached. But we need muscle, energy, imagination—"

"And experience, Captain," Lessinger said.

"Experience, yes." Sagel looked at him curiously. "Feel like trying it?"

"Yes, Captain. You see, I served in the artillery as a young man, and I have a couple of Legionnaires who were in the Caucasus campaigns. But we'll need steel cable and—"

Sagel waved his hands.

"Make a statement of what you need, and I'll sign it for the engineers. Here's an order for the cannon and ammunition. Don't get it up there for them, get delivery at the artillery park. You might as well have the fun of shooting it."

LESSINGER selected two of his groups for the task, Maroneti's and Albercu's. The chief difficulty was in getting the first men to the top, for some of the stretches rose twenty-five and thirty feet without a foothold. Sledges and spikes were used to provide a ladder, tools were hoisted with ropes, coils of thin cable. The barrel, wheels and carriage ascended easily enough, pulled up by vigorous men. The ammunition was another problem, for men with poles had to be perched along the face of the peak to keep the heavy cases from striking the rock too hard.

Before the limit set for him, Lessinger was inspecting the *kasbah* across the narrow valley, through field-glasses loaned him by the artillery major.

He wrote a message for the captain, ending with: "We could have got even the mules up here, but we'd be rather crowded." He weighed this with a stone, dropped it to those below. Then he signaled all was ready.

The effort over, the men sprawled about, nursing chafed, bleeding hands, groaning with every move. The job had exacted some peculiarly strenuous acrobatics.

Lessinger walked around the crest, looked down. On the side facing the village, south-east, the wall went down sheer, to a boulder-strewn area at the bottom. The score of men were isolated up here, safe from rifle fire, almost invisible from below.

"Maroneti," he called softly. "I believe this is the time—"

"I was thinking that all morning."

"Firing doesn't start until eleven-fifteen. We have a good quarter of an hour. We better do things according to rules, eh? That way, no one will interfere too soon."

"All right. Do you wish me to disarm him?" Maroneti asked.

"Do you take me for a cripple?" Lessinger wondered scornfully. He raised his voice: "Everybody to the center."

When they had gathered around him, he tossed his képi aside, and remained bare-headed.

"Comrades, I am about to carry out an oral clause in the last will and testament of the late d'Hervier, Lieutenant of Legion, our chief and our friend.

"The exact nature of my mission cannot be told, of course. The lieutenant wanted to keep it secret, as it involves others than himself. People who

are still alive and capable of suffering. He instructed me to obtain a document and destroy it. The one who holds it is here today. I ask him to surrender the thing. There is no use trying to deceive me, for I know the contents."

The Legionnaires looked at one another, then glances converged on Albercu, who stood at ease, smiling.

"You mean me, of course," he spoke calmly. "But suppose I refuse? I will not tolerate a personal search."

"I shall try to reason with you, Albercu."

"If you attack me—"

Maroneti stepped forward impatiently.

"Cut out the talk and give him what he wants. You can't shoot two men at the same time, you know."

"That's the first intelligent remark anyone's made in the past five minutes," Albercu declared. "I don't deny having the letter, but it's in my baggage, with the battalion convoy."

"It isn't," Lessinger said. "I went through your baggage."

"That's nice." Albercu looked at the faces crowding around him. They would take by force what he refused to give. "*Alors bon!*" he exclaimed: "I'll be agreeable."

He brought out his wallet, opened it, and from the inside compartment produced a letter, which he stared at a moment, then surrendered to Lessinger. The sergeant stepped aside, glanced at the address. Then he pulled out the long sheets of thin paper, counted them: Nine.

He looked at the first one.

"*Mon amant adoré, toi!*"

And the stretcher bearing the still form under a dark blanket swung before the sergeant's eyes. Warm, vibrating words written to a man already dead. Words meant for one man, already read by three. Words that could cause the wrecking of several lives.

He tore the sheets, the envelope, laid the scraps in the lee of a boulder, struck a match. The paper became ashes, ashes which Lessinger crushed under his sole. If d'Hervier had done this upon receiving that letter, it was quite possible that he would have been standing here, today. If—

THE men had scattered again. Albercu strolled up, half-angry, half-laughing.

"Are you satisfied, now?" he asked.

"Not quite," Lessinger replied.

"Note one thing," Albercu resumed. "You can burn that letter. But you can't burn knowledge."

"No proof, however."

"No legal proof." Albercu smiled. "However, a lady must avoid even suspicion. Those two were not alone on the steamer. Her husband would be startled to find out that he was not introduced to his fianceé's favorite partner. Just to show you how useless all this melodrama has been."

"I am something of a fool," Lessinger admitted.

"Yes, outside of military things."

"You're right. This calls for Legion methods." Lessinger took his colleague by the arm, led him to the extreme brink facing the village, a huddle of huts in the distance. "Look down there, Albercu. Pretty high, isn't it?"

The other attempted to move away, but the big sergeant halted him with a twist of the wrist.

"There won't be much left of you when you land."

Albercu tried to laugh.

"Murder? With twenty witnesses?"

"Twenty Legionnaires. Twenty mutes, that is to say, in a Legion matter. You killed the lieutenant, as surely as if you had put a knife through his heart." Lessinger shifted his grip swiftly, from the man's arm to his collar. "I'm going to throw you over. You know I am. How do you like waiting for the

worst to happen? You gave the lieutenant a month of that—"

Albercu's teeth showed like those of a frightened horse.

"It's murder. Even if they don't talk, it's murder. You have no right to kill me, Lessinger. The lieutenant might have been killed, anyway. I did not kill him with my own hands. I—"

Lessinger's face was hard as stone.

"You pushed him to his death. And that is all I am going to do, push you. I won't kill you. The boulders below will do that." His hatred, long restrained, showed in his eyes. "You don't like the idea, do you?"

"Why don't some of you stop this?" Albercu cried. "Help, help—"

Some of the Legionnaires turned their faces away, others smiled gently.

"Murderers, assassins—madmen!" Albercu's heels were on the brink. Slowly, Lessinger's weight was urging him backward. His right hand groped for his pistol; in the holster, his quivering fingers unfastened the brass clasp.

"Go ahead and draw it," Lessinger invited. "If you shoot me, we both go down together. I'm going to let you go, anyway."

Albercu was off balance now, head and shoulders arched over the pit, supported only by his executioner's grasp.

"You had your chance," Lessinger repeated. He was growing dizzy himself, with the nearness of danger.

The muzzle of the automatic rested against his ribs, over the heart. He could feel the hard metal through the cloth of his tunic. When he released his grip, the man would fire, if only by a nervous reflex. The perspiration dripped down his face. His resolution was ebbing; he wanted to live.

"For God's sake, for God's sake," Albercu panted. "Get me back. Pull me up—you're crazy—"

"A last time—shoot!"

"Give me a chance, give—"

Albercu released the grasp of his left hand on Lessinger's arm, to try to clutch his belt. In that fraction of a second, the big fellow relaxed his fingers. The Rumanian started to fall, straight as if his heels had been hinges connecting him with the stone.

The pistol exploded, too late.

There was another shot, below, in Albercu's convulsive clutching as he dropped. Then the indescribable, sickening impact echoing upward.

Lessinger turned away, walked to safety. He felt very tired.

"Had to be done," Maroneti approved.

Lessinger picked up his képi, brushed it. A sensation of utter relief flooded him. It was over. D'Hervier, Albercu, Olga—nothing remained but his real business, the Legion.

"Stand by, gunners," he called. "The signal will come any time—"

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It was a nice place for an ambush.

THE REDHEAD *from* TULLUCO

Third part of five

By GORDON YOUNG

A MUFFLED shout, a shot without warning, a wounded man with hate in his eyes—that was Red Clark's welcome to Nelplaid, where he had ridden to take over the management of the Lazy Z ranch.

The wounded man was Sam Clayton, a big cattleman who was the storm center of that faction-torn territory. But Red didn't know anything about that. All he knew was that the four men who had started the shooting had the marks of hired killers about them, that the girl with Clayton was in danger, and that no man, stranger or no, should be shot from behind without warning. So he took a hand in the game, and when the smoke cleared four men lay sprawled in the dusty street, and Red Clark was on the way of becoming a Nelplaid legend —because he had escaped untouched!

Judge Trowbridge of Nelplaid had

hired Red on the strength of his being the son of one of the West's best lawmen. After sizing up the situation he knew he would have to earn his pay.

For the owner of the Lazy Z, one J. C. Alvord, took no active supervision of the ranch—in fact he had never seen it—and expected Red to whip it into shape virtually alone. Which would be bad enough under normal conditions, and in the present case practically impossible—cattle were disappearing without trace.

Even before going out to his new job, Red had a vivid picture of the powerful factions which opposed him. Bill Clayton, son of the wounded man, had been given to understand that Red had been responsible for his father's shooting, and a group headed by the sheriff ostensibly believed the rumor.

There was only one thing to do—face it down before the story gained credence. Red confronted them, forced the instigator of the story to back down and walked out a free man, but even as he did so, he knew that the battle had merely been postponed. Some of the men who had ambushed Clayton were rustlers, and as such had made away with Lazy Z cattle. It was his fight now.

It didn't take long to find out that the law was in the enemy's camp. Red tracked some stolen cattle to the ranch of Frank Knox, a neighboring cowman, confronted him with the evidence and took him back to town to turn him over to the sheriff. And within a few hours he was free on bail, and laughing at him!

"I've brought in my last rustler alive," Red told them grimly. "The next one comes in belly-down, under a diamond hitch!"

And suddenly, into that danger-frought set-up, entered a factor which would make the impending battle doubly precarious. For the almost legendary J. C. Alvord suddenly arrived to take over active supervision of the Lazy Z. And J. C. Alvord was a woman!

WHEN Red drove the buckboard back from the livery stable he hitched the team before the general store, loosened his guns in their holsters and moved over to the Silver Dollar.

Frank Knox was with a half dozen men at the bar. The sheriff was not there but Bill Clayton was. All were well tanked and all, excepting Bill, sounded happy.

When somebody noticed Red in the doorway there were nudges and lowered voices, then silence except for the scuffle of feet as men moved and stood well away from Knox.

There was somebody's borrowed gun in Knox's holster. He drew his black brows together and glared at Red. "What do you want?"

"I wanta know who turned you loose?"

Dave Gridger spoke smoothly from behind the bar. "Some men went his bail, Red."

"I am interested for to know *who?*"

"Me for one!" said Bill Clayton sullenly and took a step forward, his hand moving a little toward his hip, but not quite enough to make it a threat.

"That's shore callin' 'im!" some fellow squeaked nervously. Then he wished that he hadn't said anything, for Red's eyes picked him out, just the same as asking, "Do you want some trouble?"

It was quiet, hushed to breathlessness. Gridger's arm was half raised as if to reach across the bar and get hold of Bill, but Gridger let his arm drop.

Red and Bill eyed each other and it certainly looked as if Red had been invited into a fight and wasn't accepting. Bill's lumpish face had a sullen scowl, faintly glowing with triumph. He wore a silver-plated gun in a stamped leather holster, and his hand was set to jerk. The lump of a gold ring was like a big wart on his middle finger.

Gridger said softly, "Now you boys don't want to have no hard feelin's! Bill, you just calm down!"

Knox looked mean and defiant, too, as if he were anxious to uphold his end of the fight if it came. There was so much silence that Knox couldn't keep still any longer.

"Well, what are you goin' to do about it?" he said.

He got his answer. It came cold and quiet. "I'm goin' to kill you—unless you turn belly-up here before all your friends and show 'em just how you won't fight!"

Knox tightened his black brows and glared. He was mean but he was afraid. He frowned as hard as he could, trying not to look afraid. He hated Red as a snake hates a dog that has snapped it up and shook it. He acted tensely as if about to draw, but he didn't.

Red slapped him with words. "Now maybe folks won't think anybody snuck up on you while you was asleep! And as for you, Bill Clayton, go ahead and be a damn fool if you want. You are backin' a cow thief and a four-flusher!"

There was a dead silence. Red waited to see if anybody wanted to speak up. Nobody did.

"What I come in here for to say," Red explained, "is that the Lazy Z ain't goin' to be used no more by rustlers. It used to be used by Knox to run off cows. Then Knox and them started in stealin' Lazy Z cows. I'm servin' notice that the healthfulest place rustlers can find is as far off my range as they can git to.

"And you, Bill Clayton. You ain't over-bright to go even straw-bail for a man that run off Clayton cows through the valley and—"

Bill said, "How do you think you know so damn much?"

"Your father told me!"

Bill looked sullenly unhappy. His glance twitched toward Dave Gridger, but the fat saloon man was eying Red and trying not to seem astounded.

Everybody sensed that Red had come in there looking for a fight, and it was pretty plain that he wasn't going to get it. The way he had knocked over Mell Barber's men was just a little too much for anybody to want to walk into him.

Red waited until it was plain that Knox wasn't going to do anything, or Bill either. Then he said, "This will be about all for today."

He backed from the doorway, and when he was out of sight nobody said anything for almost a full minute. Men looked at Knox as if at something who had turned into a stranger. He saw how they looked, knew how they felt.

Bill said, "You are yaller!"

Knox said, "Boys, I'm not." He put out his right hand. "I know how it looks, but my wrist is so sore from the way that—" He called Red ugly names —"tied me up that it is stiff. I just would have been clumsy. But I am going to kill him. I swear to God that I'm goin' to kill him!" He added hastily, "And in a fair fight, too." Knox rubbed at his wrist. "Just as soon as this wrist is all limber again, I am going to find him and have it out!"

Gridger put out glasses and bottles, invitationally. "Step along up, boys. On the house!"

THE buckboard had gone only a few miles when Jane Alvord's joints seemed shaken to pieces by the jolting of the rutty road. She asked, "How much farther?"

"We ain't halfway."

"Is the road all like this?"

"Worse."

"*Worse?*"

"You want me to take you back to town?"

She sighed and her tight lips smiled a little at Red. "I never turn back."

"You set too stiff and straight, Miss. You got to sorta slump and take it easy-like. Like you was a little drunk."

"I am afraid I can't comply. I am totally ignorant of the condition that you suggest. And I never slumped in my life. As a young girl I wore a board strapped to my back to keep my shoulders straight. And now," with a faint hint of teasing, "you tell me that is all wrong!"

"For ridin' a buckboard on a rough road. Maybe all right for school teachin'."

"I am not interested in school teaching, and never was."

"Then why'd you do it?"

"There are two ways that a lady can procure her livelihood. One is by marrying. The other is teaching."

"Why didn't you marry?"

"I preferred to teach."

"But you just said you didn't like it."

"I didn't."

"Then why didn't you marry?"

"I told you that I preferred to teach!"

Red clucked to the horses, thought it over, asked, "Ain't they no nice fellers back East?"

"Of course."

"Then why didn't you catch yourself one?"

Jane laughed a little. They were in the open country with not a place of habitation or sign of man, other than the road, in sight.

That in itself gave a sense of freedom, and Red's simple directness was almost like a new language to her. There was a good deal of the repressed tease in the prematurely severe Miss Alvord. She asked, "How does one go about catching a man?"

"You women was born knowin' how!"

"I am afraid that enlightment was left out of my heritage."

"Shucks. When you see one you want, I bet you get 'im all right!"

Jane laughed quietly. It may have been the air, the scenery, the relief of not feeling that she had to be on guard against misinterpretation; but she soon found herself talking quite freely.

When her parents died, she had become a teacher in a girls' school; and because she was young, she had to be that much more grave.

All the teachers in the seminary were dour and severe. Her only dream had been to escape. She knew of an uncle in the West and thought that much better of him because he had been a black sheep. Somehow she had learned that he was near the town of Nelplaid and had written, but no reply came. Yet it must have affected him a little, because he told Judge Trowbridge that he had a relative in Boston—"But he didn't say that I was a girl. I suppose he was ashamed of having an old maid school teacher as his only living relative."

Red turned on the seat, faced her. "You don't look much like an old maid when you smile."

She looked startled for an instant, then she smiled.

BECAUSE Red had driven slowly and stopped often, it was starlight when they came to the ranch. For some time Jane had been tired and silent. The deepening shadows and loneliness of the pine-covered hills, all strange, and her own weariness, gave her rather a large apprehensiveness about venturing among unknown men in a one-room house. But anything, she thought, was better than being an old maid school teacher.

The boys and cook came out, saw the buckboard, recognized Red's black horse, unsaddled and tied behind the buckboard; and they saw a woman on the front seat.

Cook peered and grumbled in an awe-struck voice: "Now what's that fool Red gone and done?"

"Married 'er, I bet!" Pete guessed.

"Stole 'er!" said Bobby.

"I'm leavin' if that's a woman!" said the cook.

"You better be all right people," he said.

"I reckon it's a woman," Bobby explained, " 'less he put Knox in skirts and drug him back out here to help you cook."

They didn't say a word as the buckboard came up and stopped. They merely stood and stared in the clear starlight, stared quite as hard at Red as at the woman.

Red calmly wrapped the lines around the whip, got out, held up his hand to help her down. Her long skirts were very much in the way.

Red took off his hat. "Boys, this here is our boss. She owns the ranch. Miss, this here is cook, Bobby and Pete. Cook don't like women, so he say, but he's an awful liar. All cooks is!"

Jane said, "How do you do?" Cook mumbled. Bobby and Pete marched up closer, stuck out their hands.

"I told her," said Red, "they was four

men and only one room fer us all."

For a long minute nobody said anything. The boys were confused by the implication, and Jane felt herself blushing. Red's matter-of-fact frankness was not altogether amusing.

"It'll be all right, Miss," Bobby told her. "We'll fix somehow so you'll be fine. And we'll gag the cook here. He snores like sawin' through a barrel."

They were very young and she was a woman, and all women are lovely to lonely boys on the range; and besides, in the bright starlight she smiled at them. Then she stepped up to the frowsy cook, whose corncob dangled in his mouth, and she held out her hand. "Red has told me what a wonderful cook you are!"

Cook straightened, took the corncob from his mouth, shook hands, and running a thumb under his lone suspender, he said solemnly, "You can sure count on whatever Red tells you, Miss."

Cook, who didn't like women for much the same reason that most sensible men don't like them—because he had such a helpless weakness for them that they could make a big fool out of him without any trouble at all—stuck the pipe into a hip pocket and began to unlash the trunk. He nearly broke his lone suspender in eagerness to carry in more than the two kids.

Red had brought along two bottles of whisky. He kept one out of sight, let the other go into the house with groceries. He rolled a cigarette and looked on while cook and the boys did all the toting. When they were in the house, he said slowly, "Miss, if you are goin' to be a cowman, you've got to be one. You just eat our grub, don't be finicky about our talk, and purt-near pertend you ain't a woman."

"But Red, please, *how* can I sleep in one room with f-four men?"

"By shuttin' your eyes and forgettin' us. I told you before you come how it was—and you come."

"I couldn't quite visualize the circumstances. I was so eager to get away from people, all people that huddle together in even a small town. I wanted to be free. But isn't there any other possible arrangement—here?"

"No'm. Now you lissen. Me, I like women fine, and I like you. Nobody's goin' to hurt a hair of your head. All us will eat anybody alive that does. But this is a ranch and we're cowhands. We sleep in our underwear and we snore. We get up at night to get a drink from the pump. We cuss some in fun, and sometimes when cook needs a dressin' down. I didn't want you out here, but here you are, and as owner you are boss. But I'm your foreman and you'll do like I say or you'll get another foreman. I think you're much nicer now than I thought when I first seen you; but if you was ten times nicer, you'd still have to do like I say, 'cause when I run an outfit I run it!"

Jane Alvord looked at him steadily with a good deal of the old maid sticking out, but she didn't say a word. Something deep within her, some of the black sheep blood that had made her uncle a strong, if not an entirely honorable, man among strong men, made her respect the lanky redhead that fought four men at a time and carried hog-tied rustlers into town. She herself, both by nature and training, was pretty bossy; but there was also something within her, as within most bossy women, that made her reluctantly admire anybody who could boss her.

THE boys and cook came back. Bobby carried a lantern and he swung it up the better to see her face. Jane, perhaps remembering what Red had said about the old maid look, smiled. After all, they were just eager youngsters and showed their delight in having a lady boss; and she was a very lonely-hearted person, pleased at being admired.

" 'Nother thing," Red explained, dropping the cigarette and squishing it into the dust, "you've got to learn to ride. You can't ride in skirts. So you might as well begin to be nice to Bobby, who is about your size, so he will loan you some of his pants."

When things were out of the wagon, Red drove over to the stable-sheds, unharnessed, watered the horses. He rubbed Devil's velvety nose and confided, "Son, how it come that all of a sudden on the same day we run into two nice ladies? Only bein' nice don't keep our lady-boss from bein' just so much extra weight to carry, and not a damn bit of use—does it?"

He buried his extra bottle of whisky in the litter at the bottom of a manger and went back into the house, where he found the boys bustling and sweating with ropes and poles and blankets, trying to rig up a little private place for Jane to bunk in. She looked doubtful and slightly forlorn as she held up a lantern so the cook could see to drive nails.

"What's all this monkey-doodlin'?" Red demanded.

"We are fixin' Miss some privacy," said Bobby.

"You are fixin' up for her to purt-near smother, too. Cook, you go get something to eat. I'll finish this up. And open that bottle of whisky."

When they learned about Knox being turned loose on straw-bail, cook looked solemnly down his nose, and Bobby and Pete chimed a warning:

"You'll have to look out, Red!"

"He makes his brag that nobody ever got the best of him!"

"He knows this country like I know the inside of my hat!"

"He'll sure lay for you, Red!"

Red told them, "You pups have got to learn about folks and things. First off, anybody that is doin' something sneaky is scairt. And anybody that is scairt is unsure and easy rattled. I've seen some real bad men in my time and Knox ain't got their earmarks. He," said Red, hammering away," is yaller from the bottom tip of his skunk-shaped tail to the tip-top end of his Injun-black hair."

Red was very tired and very sleepy, but he was handy at rough carpentry. He nailed the poles, braced them with ropes, rigged a sort of small clothes line arrangement, took blankets and fastened them to the clothes line.

When supper was ready the bottle of whisky, opened but untouched, was on the table. Cook may have been tempted but he had not fallen. Whisky was poured into cups, and Jane, not admitting that she had never in her life tasted whisky, tried a sip, made a face and was astonished that anybody could enjoy the stuff.

Bobby and Pete, with the appetite of young wolves, helped themselves to another supper and chewed noisily with their eyes on Jane's face. And as they were merely kids, their eagerness didn't make Jane uncomfortable.

After supper, Red said abruptly, "I can't stand this cook's snorin'." He took up his bedding and went outdoors. Pete and Bobby decided that they preferred to sleep out in the fresh air. Cook hurried through with the dishes and in a mumble explained that he always slept out doors this time of year.

So Jane Alvord was left alone in the big dim room with her trunk and boxes and blanket-partitioned bunk. She sat thoughtfully by the lamplight, lonely, a little nervous, but not afraid. She felt like crying, half happily. The awkward courtesy of these boys, their slightly worshipful eagerness to please her, stirred bewildering emotions. She smiled, too, because Red, after laying down the law about having to sleep in the same room with them, had been the first to move out. She made the pleasing guess that Red, and the others, were really quite as helpless with women as a woman liked for men to be. But she decided that

she couldn't, really could not, have them sleeping out of doors. Tonight, yes—but not tomorrow night.

DURING the next few days Red and the boys worked almost as if it were roundup time in bunching Lazy Z cows in the valley so as to have some idea how much of a herd was left.

Red rode with rifle in a saddle scabbard, a supply of cartridges in his belt. He rode alone most of the time and was alert but not anxious.

When Jane mentioned to the cook how Red had fought with four men and killed three during his first ten minutes in town, cook dropped his arms, gasped slowly, "Wha-at?"

"Didn't you know?"

"Know? Gosh A'mighty, no! You mean that boy is a killer like that?" Cook forgot himself and swore in amazement. "And me, I sassed 'im for a wet-nosed kid the day he rode in and he didn't git mad! No wonder he rode down on Knox and snaked 'im outa his house like a bogged-down dogie!"

When cook imparted the story to the boys and they tried to question Red, he shuffled his feet and told them, "Figger it out anyway you like, but when you get done about all you can say is that me, I'm lucky. Sorta allus was. Sorta mean to stay that way."

And when Jane asked him why he had not told of the fight, Red gave her a solemn stare. "Miss, my dad brought me up that when you done what you orta, keep your mouth shut.. If you don't, it means that doin' what you orta is kinda exceptional and has turned your head a little."

Jane could not bring herself to wear Bobby's pants, but she meant to learn to ride. She took one of her heavy skirts, shortened, it, split it, sewed it into a divided skirt. Cook, from day to day, put a rope on a gentle horse and led it about with her in the saddle until she began to get the feel and balance of being on horseback.

Her face became tanned. Her hair, that she had worn since girlhood tightly drawn back into a knot, began to squirm from under hairpins and try to curl. She was soon eating in a way that made cook proud of himself. She had made the boys return to their bunks, and even though cook did snore like a saw going through a split plank, she slept so well that she did not hear him—much.

Soon she was riding out alone. The horse was old and gentle, but she did not go far, then only at a walk. Trotting jiggled her so that she could not breathe, and she was too unsure of her seat to gallop. Cook said that it she ever got lost to give the horse his head and he would bring her home.

She was four or five miles from home one afternoon when she saw three men gallop out of a clump of trees toward her.

Jane's heart flew up into her mouth. She wanted to turn and run, but she could not ride well enough; so she pulled the horse about and faced them, waiting with lips set tightly.

They were rough looking men, or so she thought. To her, all Western men looked rough. The one in the lead was straight in the saddle, hard-faced, hard-eyed, not young. His coat was tied on the saddle behind him, but he wore a vest.

The horsemen pulled up, pulled off their hats.

"You are Miss Alvord?"

"I am."

"Miss Alvord, we are having a look at the country. Thinking of buying a little ranch."

"Mine is not for sale."

They were polite in a restrained hard-staring way, but she felt that the man was lying about wanting to buy a ranch. She thought that he had a harder face than the other men. All of them wore revolvers and carried rifles.

"Miss Alvord, can you tell us where the Knox ranch is?"

"No, I can't. It is near here, but I do not know the country very well."

"If you don't mind, we'll just ride home with you and have one of your boys tell us. I believe that Red Clark is your foreman."

Jane was frightened. She thought that they had come to find Red, and they looked dangerous.

"No one is at home," she said, "except the cook."

"We will go with you and wait for Red."

That made her more frightened. They rode with her, keeping at a slow walk and not even talking among themselves. She didn't know what to do. Her gentle horse bobbed his head at every step, plodding homeward. Jane sat stiffly erect and tight-mouthed and felt that she was a coward because she knew that she was afraid.

Cook appeared in the doorway, a hand shading his eyes. He knew nearly everybody in the country, but he did not know these men. He went to where his rifle lay on pegs in the kitchen part of the room, slapped the lever, throwing a shell into the chamber, then put the rifle against the wall at the side of the door. He waited in the door, pulled at the ends of his long rat-tail mustache and peered with a blear-eyed scowl.

Jane rode up close to the door. "These men want to know the way to the Knox ranch."

Cook kept one hand out of sight, his fingers on the rifle's barrel, for he could see that she was frightened. "Why sure." He gestured with the hand that was in sight. "You go right over there south a piece, then—"

The men were getting out of their saddles.

"We'll stay for supper," said the hard-eyed man, and walked over to offer his hand to Jane to help her dismount.

Strangers of course had a right to stay to supper, and all night, too; but it was the part of good manners for them to hang around without saying why until supper was ready, then be invited and to act a little as if they hadn't expected to be invited.

"We'll water and feed the horses." said one of the bulky men in a thick voice as if he had a bad cold.

The leader nodded and watched Jane go indoors. He gave the cook a straight look. "She is afraid of us. From what I hear of the country, I don't blame her. We will wait outside until the men folks ride in. We are all right people."

Cook nipped a mustache end between thumb and finger.

"You'd better be," he said, "because she is a nice woman!"

He picked up the rifle, took it with him over to the stove and up-ended it against the cook table.

THE three strangers stayed outdoors, squatting together and talking a little in low voices. Jane remained over at the cook's end of the room. She was sure that they were waiting to kill Red. The cook puttered at getting supper, mumbled reassuringly, guessed that Red was sorta able to have something to say about that.

"—but you ortn't be out here to this ranch. It ain't no place for a lady."

"If there is trouble," said Jane tightly, "I want to be with *my* boys!"

Cook blinked his bleary eyes and grinned. "You are shore all right!"

And Jane Alvord, seminary instructress in history and Latin, flushed with pride. Not many days before she would have drawn her skirts aside from this old shambling fellow as from something unclean; now she felt like hugging him.

They heard hoof beats and went to the door, cook bringing along his rifle. Red was riding up, fast. As soon as he had caught sight of the strangers outside of the house he suspected that they had

come for trouble, had perhaps already made some. But when he saw that the tall man who stood up had been the stranger in the hotel room with Mr. Clayton, Red's feelings changed and he swung out of the saddle with "Howdy?" in a friendly way.

Cook was a little relieved, but nevertheless grumbled to Jane, "Then I guess they are goin' to stay for supper. I was expectin' Red would shoot 'em. Save me so much cookin'."

The strong-faced man was saying, "I am Mr. Vickers, Red. George Vickers. That horse of yours is one of the Dunham black breed?"

Red rubbed his cheek against the horse's nose. "He is."

"And branded Arrowhead."

"Sure. The Arrowhead is home to me when I'm in Tulluco."

"When I first saw the horse in town I wondered. Dunham never sells a horse of the black breed. But I heard from Judge Trowbridge how it was. I am afraid that we made Miss Alvord nervous by riding down on her the way we did."

After supper Mr. Vickers took Red out of the house and they went for a little walk down behind the corral. Mr. Vickers stopped, struck a match, turned back his vest and showed Red a small gold badge that said *United States Marshal.* Then they climbed up on the top pole of the corral.

"I am after that outlaw Kilco, Red."

"I'd help you catch 'im in a minute."

"The two men with me are Wells Fargo men. I am after him because he killed my deputy. Too bad, Red, that you didn't drop Mell Barber that day in town. He is wanted, too—dead or alive. What do you know about Kilco? He's known to some people, I understand, as Brady."

Red rolled a cigarette, but chewed on the match stick for a time before lighting it. He wondered if he ought to tell the marshal that Kilco was in love with Kate Clayton and she with him. He didn't like to bring her name into it. Red said, "Umm-m," thoughtfully. "I sure have got no use at all for outlaws." He felt that he had even less use for this one because of the way a lovely girl like Kate loved him.

The marshal put a hand on Red's knee. "I am trying to keep Kilco and Barber from knowing that I am up here. Sam Clayton has known me for thirty years. He said that it was all right for me to confide in the judge. And you, of course.

"This Kilco is a bad one and hard to catch. The Wells Fargo boys have found out that he comes up in this neighborhood frequently. That's why we are up here pretending to be looking for a ranch.

"I understand that your rustler friend Knox is thick with the bunch, or used to be."

Red rubbed out the cigarette, put a hand up under his hat, scratched. "Knox, he ain't to home. I rode over to his place yesterday to see. He ain't been home, either."

"If he had been, it might have been bad for you!"

"No more'n for him."

"The man indoors has the advantage."

"Not over a skinny man behind a tree. Lots of trees up there."

"We won't argue. Knox hasn't been around town, either." The marshal shook his head. "If you get any news, just send word into the judge. We'll be in Nelplaid every few days."

"If I hear anything, I'll sure let you know."

"By the way, Red, isn't it a little—well, um—this young woman living here with you boys?"

"She's owner."

"It's going to be hard on her reputation."

"It's goin' to be harder on anybody as meddles with her repytation. She is all right."

THE following afternoon Red thought that he would ride over to old Mr. Backman's and to find out if he knew that Jim Brady was Kilco. Red didn't want to believe that, but he was almost willing to bet that Kate and Brady-Kilco met over at Mr. Backman's cabin. It made him mad to think that a girl like that would be in love with an outlaw.

Red was riding a skittish buckskin that showed lots of white in his feverish eyes. The skittishness irritated Red because he was trying to think. Thinking didn't seem to do him much good, for he had been awake most of the night mulling things over. Ought he to have told the marshal about Kate and Kilco?

He had crossed the valley and was edging up to the steep bluff covered with pines when rifles cracked at him.

The horse made a tremendous bound and came down on limber forelegs, falling headlong with a bullet through his heart. Red landed face down, badly jolted and skinned a little. Vaguely he heard an exultant yell, "We got him!"

Red squirmed about, peering up the steep side of the hogback. For a moment he felt that he couldn't see very well; then he saw three men coming out from among the trees to ride down on him and make sure. They weren't much over a hundred and fifty yards off, but the hogback rose sharply, almost like a bluff, and they would have to zigzag down in a roundabout way. It was a nice place for an ambush. One of the men was Knox.

Red got up, reached unconsciously for his hat brim to shut out the sun's glare, but he had lost his hat. He could hear echoes of the cussing that the horsemen gave him for not being dead. They had rifles in their hands, and all piled out of the saddles, shooting. Still a little dizzy, he ran drunkenly back to his dead horse, and they mistook his staggering for a bad wound.

He pulled a revolver, rested his forearm on the horse's rump, raised the front sight well up and let fly. It was a long way for a .45 slug to carry accurately, but some of the bullets came close enough for the fellows up there to think it was best to get in behind trees. One of them hurriedly led the horses back behind a ledge of rock.

Red's eyes were clear. He said to himself, "I ain't got much of a hole to hide in with them up there shootin' down—glad I ain't fat." The horse had fallen on the rifle scabbard, and Red had to stand up and turn his back while he jerked two or three times to free it, and bullets were smacking at him. He was not much of a rifle shot, not as he considered good shooting, but he had plenty of ammunition, providing he didn't burn it up recklessly.

He could not hope to pick them off behind trees and rocks, but he knew that if he wasn't hit he could stand them off until night. Then he would have to walk four or five miles to the ranchhouse in the dark.

It was hot. An hour passed. He watched warily, keeping his face down along the rifle, but not shooting often. The men were hugging the trees and Red waited, but apparently they didn't mean to get careless. They were not shooting very rapidly now. Two or three times he got shots away as some one changed to another tree to get a better view of his sprawled-out body, but he didn't see anybody drop.

From somewhere the flies began to come, attracted by the blood ooze of the horse. He wiped the dirt from a pebble and put it into his mouth, wishing for water. It seemed to him that the sun had caught on a snag in the heavens and was standing still.

TWO hours went by. Red wanted a drink but instead took a smoke. His mouth was sticky. Flies hummed in his face, smacked his neck and started biting.

The men on the bluff were shooting again, rapidly, pouring down slugs. Smoke popped out from rifle muzzles, swirled as if from a damp fire. Red scrouged down, peering. The sun was in his eyes and his hat was gone. Some of the bullets had the whine of flies, some of the flies the buzz of bullets.

Two bullets in a row flecked dirt on the same leg by a miss of inches, and Red thought:

"I orta pertended to be dead in the first place and let 'em come down clost."

He had a simple-minded faith in close fighting. Sharpshooting was not to his liking. He fingered his belt, counting the rifle cartridges, and decided to hold his fire. Anyhow there was too much smoke from the guns up there for him to draw a bead. All he could do was to pour in a lot of bullets blindly.

The sun seemed hanging right where it had been. His hand swiped the back of his neck, taking off flies. Something tugged at the handkerchief as if fingers had jerked it. "Close!" said Red, but added serenely, "Close is a miss, allus!" He huddled himself to his knees, crouching low, took the best aim he could, and touched the trigger.

Smoke swirled out in the still air before him like a cloud, and before it cleared Red heard a startled yelping.

"I must 've had some luck!" he thought, and confusedly changed the thought because guns were going off up there like the brittle crack of dried sticks in a fire; and bullets were not coming toward him.

He raised himself and saw dim shapes flitting in the timber as men raced for their horses; then he heard the crash of limbs as they rode, caught glimpses of horses laboring along the hillside. Red straightened up with the rifle to his shoulder, worked the lever, throwing bullets after them.

When the gun was empty he lowered it, stood peering up.

"I owe somebody some thanks," he said, then cupped a hand to his mouth and hallooed.

He guessed that old Mr. Backman, attracted by the shooting, had walked in on the men; then he changed his guess with a shake of his head. "Nope. If that old feller had drawed a bead on a man that man wouldn't be ridin' off."

RED hallooed again, then listened. Echoes flitted like dim shadows of sound; then, nearly as dim as the last echo, a shout reached his straining ears.

Red went forward, pausing to shout, wanting an answer. Then, instead of hearing a shout, a gun was fired. That settled any doubts. Nobody who was trying to draw him into a trap would start shooting instead of shouting. He pitched the rifle down and stumbled at a run to the foot of the hogback's bluff, and began a zigzag climb. He had more faith in revolvers than in a rifle, anyhow.

He got to where Knox and the men had stood behind trees. The ground was sprinkled with brass.

"Hey!" Red sang out. "Where the hell are you?"

Higher up on the hill and over to one side, a voice said, "Here!"

Red clambered up, looked over a fallen tree and found Jim Brady-Kilco bare-headed on the ground. He peered up with a pain-twisted smile and his eyes had a fever-bright stare, much like the look Red had seen in the eyes of wounded animals that watched a man come up to kill them. He held the revolver with which he had been answering Red's shouts but dropped it. "Got any water?"

Red climbed over the fallen tree that crumbled under him like loose clods.

"You bad hurt?"

"My leg. Busted. High up."

Red stooped over.

"You knowed they was after me?"

"I guessed it was you. I left my horse

down over yonder and crept up. When I saw it was Knox I knew it must be you."

"They mustn't have knowed they hit you from the way they run."

"Knox, he happened to see me just as I stood up behind that log. He shot all of a sudden. I went down but kept throwing bullets. I couldn't see, but I made noise."

"They high-tailed like they was carryin' hot coals in their hip pockets. Why did *you* pitch in to help me?"

Kilco stared at him and Red stared back. There was something so plain in Red's face that Kilco said, "You know who I am?"

"I wish I didn't!"

Kilco lifted himself on an elbow, looked toward the fallen revolver.

"You don't need that," Red told him.

"Some three to six thousand dollars. I don't quite know myself," said Kilco.

"You ain't very smart!"

"How you mean, Red?"

"I'll never want money bad enough to turn over somebody that got hurt helpin' me. 'Specially not when I sure as hell needed some help!"

Kilco slumped back down on the dense pine needles. "I don't know what to do."

"I'll go find your horse and take you over to old Backman. He's your friend."

Kilco nodded. "He isn't home. I was just over there. Sometimes he's away for days."

"Can you set a horse?"

"I'll have to."

Red rolled a cigarette, lighted it, put it in Kilco's mouth, then put his own hat, crown-down, under Kilco's face to protect the dry pine needles from the chance of fire. Kilco said. "You are a good kid."

"You lied to me in town, sayin' you didn't know who them fellers was?"

"I had to." Kilco nodded submissively. "But I don't know what made them do it. I think rustlers must have put Mell Barber up to it."

"You an' him had a little fallin' out, so folks say."

"We did."

"What over?"

"Something I can't talk about," said Kilco.

"Who was them with Knox here today?"

"I didn't see. They were on the far side. When I looked up, Knox was right there. He let fly and I got hit. Then he yelled and must've run. What are you goin' to do now?"

"Which way is your horse? Mine is dead."

"Where will you take me?"

"To our ranch. Does the cook there know you?"

"I don't know him."

"Well, everybody else there will be all right. He is a no good old feller and was friends with Alvord. But if he knows you and knows of the reward—still, what better can I do? It is for you to say."

"I think my leg is broke up close to the hip."

Red took the cigarette from Kilco. rubbed out the fire against a piece of wood held over the hat, dusted out the hat and put it on. "It is steep up here for a horse but I'll bring him. You're a big fellow, but I'll get you on."

"I can set a saddle if I can get into it."

"I'll get you into it."

Red squatted down, bringing his face on a level with Kilco and stared for a moment. "I'll do ever'thing for you I can like I was the best friend you've got. Only it has got to be understood I ain't your friend!"

Kilco stared back suspiciously. "How you mean?"

"It was an outlaw shot my dad—in the back. Me and outlaws don't be friends, ever!"

"You don't think—"

"I know *you* didn't because I know who did. I killed him, right up face to face. Now you pitched in here today and helped me, so you are goin' to be took good care of. But once you can ride again, we ain't friends."

Kilco was suffering but he tried to smile. "I don't understand, but I know you are all right."

RED found Kilco's horse back near the trail to Mr. Backman's place. He led the horse up the steep hill, found the footing hard for his own feet, found thinking harder. He had been friends with fool cowboys on the dodge and had helped them; a time or two he had had to light out and duck away himself when people misunderstood about something. But he had never befriended an out-and-out outlaw.

He found Kilco with a pain-twisted mouth trying not to cry out. He writhed and clutched dry pine needles. Agony had begun to come into the wound.

"You're a purty big man. All I can do is help boost you up. It's goin' to be hell. On you, I mean."

"Help me to stand so I can get hold of the horn."

"First I'll shorten this left stirrup so you can put more weight on your good leg."

There was sweat on Kilco's face and he kept his teeth clenched. He was bleeding a little and pain screamed in his leg. He raised himself on his hands and knee, then took hold of Red with one hand, of the stirrup with the other, and pulled himself up, breathing hard. He got his hand on the horn.

"I don't see how you're goin' to get up without hurtin' yourself terrible."

"I have to get up!"

Red locked his fingers together and stooped until his hands were on the ground before Kilco's foot. Kilco held the horn and gave a little hop, inching the ball of his foot onto Red's locked hands. He pulled on the horn and Red lifted, raising him until his foot was even with the stirrup. Kilco squirmed the toe of his foot onto the stirrup, but his right leg dangled helplessly. He could not throw it over the saddle. In a muffled voice, through set teeth, "You'll have to drag that leg over for me."

"It'll purt-near kill you."

"Worse can't be much worse. Do it!"

Kilco raised himself as high as he could in the shortened stirrup and held to the horn with both hands, leaning against the saddle as if he had cramps. The horse swung its head inquiringly at this awkward way of mounting and sagged a shoulder yieldingly to the weight. Red pushed Kilco's limp leg around the horse's rump, but the high cantle was still in the way.

Kilco said, almost in a scream, "Go on! Get me into the saddle!"

Red pulled the leg around and Kilco cried out in agony; then he said angrily, "Go on! Don't pay attention!"

Kilco sat down in the saddle. His hands on the horn were white from the tenseness with which he had gripped the horn.

Red took off his spurs and tied them to his belt. He took the horse up close to the bit and began to lead him down the hillside. It was hard going.

THEY reached the ranchhouse about dark. Jane, the two kids and cook came out, wonderingly. Red told them how it was, letting them think that Kilco was a stray cowboy, although anybody except Jane would have known that not many cowboys wore as much finery as this man.

Kilco was the next thing to unconscious when they helped him out of the saddle and carried him into the house; and he was completely out when they laid him in a bunk. Cook kept

looking at Red in a queer way, but he brought water and clothes. Red cut off Kilco's boot, ripped his pant's leg, to get to the wound. The leg was swollen and purple.

"The poor fellow is suffering terrible!" Jane said.

"Nothin' much to what he will soon. Cook, you go out to the stable and in the manger, second from the north, deep down, you will find a bottle of whisky I have been keepin' hid. That will have to do for medicine. You two kids go too to see that he comes back sober."

They all went as if it were some kind of a game. Red watched solemnly until they were well away from the door. He touched Jane's arm.

"Miss, he orta have a doctor. All I have told you about how he helped me is so. Only I haven't told you all. He is Jim Kilco, the outlaw!"

"Red!" Jane was frightened. "What shall we do?"

"Take care of 'im till he can ride, of course."

"B-but an *outlaw!*"

"I don't give a damn who he is. He got hurt helpin' me," Red droned softly. "It was the same as helpin' you, too, because the fight was over how I been runnin' your ranch."

Jane stooped a little nearer to Kilco, her face twisted with concern. He was barely breathing and his eyes were half open as if he were dead.

Red shrugged a shoulder. "Till he can ride I'll do what I can to keep him from gettin' caught."

"Oh Red, I am afraid that he will die!"

"Yes'm. What they call gangrene is purty liable to set in. An old-timer like Mr. Backman might know what to do, but he ain't home, which is why I brought him here."

"He must have a doctor."

"If we fetch the doctor from Nelplaid, he will sure talk to somebody about a wounded man out here. And if we tell him not to, he will be that much surer to talk."

"*Something* must be done, Red!"

"We can't keep him here without tellin' the boys and the cook, because we all are goin' to have to act funny about not lettin' people get in the house and see 'im. The boys will be all right, but I don't know about that cook. Some thousands of dollars is a lot of money."

The cook and the kids came in with the bottle of whisky and the kids wanted to tell how they had kept the cook from making off with it, but Jane pointed toward the bunk and they shut up.

Red opened the bottle and poured a deep drink for the cook in a coffee cup. He gave drinks to the kids and mixed some with water for Jane to give to Kilco when he stirred.

"You'd better have a little, too, miss."

Red had the frontier belief in the beneficial effect of whisky if used moderately. Jane was badly shaken and she drank a spoonful of whisky and water.

Red sat and thought a while; then he told the boys to bring in his horse. "And put on one of your saddles. Bring mine in tomorrow. And take that horse I brung in with him on it over to—well, you turn him loose so he'll go home. I'm goin' to town to see about a doctor."

Cook had sneaked over to the table and poured more whisky into his cup before Red took away the bottle. Cook grinned as if he had won a big jackpot, tossed the whisky down his throat, rubbed his belly.

A moment later he beckoned Red to the back door and they stepped outside.

Cook put his face up close to Red's and asked. "Will you whack with me if I tell you how to get a pile of money?"

It was dark out back. Red took hold of cook's shoulder and struck a match, holding it near his face. "How do you know who he is, cook?"

"Him and old Al was friends."

"Did he come here?"

"No, but Al told me about him. Sometimes Al rode with the bunch. Sometimes they would be gone for ten days to two weeks to hold up a train somers."

"Did he help Alvord rustle cows?" Red sounded, and he almost felt, as though stealing cows was worse than robbing trains. "Did he?"

"Not as I know of."

Red held the match until the flame nipped his fingers. He dropped it, stepped on it, lit another match.

"Now cook, you listen. You have been kinda friends with a bad bunch for a long time and kept your mouth shut. You just go right on keepin' it shut. Don't you get any notion of gettin' yourself some reward unless you want to have it spent in a fine coffin. You hear me?"

RED got into Nelplaid about eight in the morning. He rode straight to the hotel. One of the Wells-Fargo men was straddling a chair on the porch with his arms across the back. He was the fattish one with the hoarse voice.

He came to meet Red and asked in a voice as if he had a bad cold, "Anything?"

"I come to see Miss Clayton."

"They moved old Clayton out to the ranch yesterday. The doctor they brought up here again from Poicoma said it was bad, but old Clayton was frettin' to get home. Anything about that feller Kilco?"

Red took out papers and tobacco. "Is the marshal in town?"

"Somewhere." Eagerly, "You want to see him?"

Red inhaled deeply, eyed the Wells-Fargo man. "You can tell him that I'll be up to the judge's office for a little talk."

The man hunched forward, more as if bullying than asking. "You know something?"

"A little, maybe—and maybe not."

"What? Tell me!"

"I'll tell the marshal."

"All right. You be there." The man had a bossy sound. "I'll go find him."

Red went to the judge's room. The judge had his feet on the table, a book in his hand. He was in his shirt-sleeves. It was a hot morning and the bandana was in his hand to mop about his neck. He looked quizzically at Red's sober face. "Trouble, son?"

"How far it is out to the Clayton ranch?"

"About fifteen to twenty miles. Why?"

"I sorta wondered."

"The marshal told me that you two had a talk."

"Yeah. We're goin' to have another purty soon."

"Kilco, Red?"

The judge cleared his throat and beamed. "I hope you get the reward!"

Heavy footsteps marched down the hall. The marshal and the two Wells-Fargo men came in. The marshal was Western from the heart out, calm and hard.

He pushed back his hat with a slow movement, looked with approving directness at Red. "You have news for me?"

Red eyed the Wells-Fargo men. They were taking chairs.

The judge placed a chair for the marshal.

"Hot," he said companionably. "Sit down, Red."

"I talk better on my feet," Red replied moodily. He pulled at the handkerchief about his neck, breathed slowly, lifted his look from the floor to the marshal who sat straight-backed, waiting. "I'd rather take a beatin' than have this talk. But I'd rather take a harder one than not have it. You can see how I feel. So here goes."

The marshal leaned forward stiffly, rubbed his cheek. The Wells-Fargo men

took out cigars, settled back in their chairs, stared at Red as if about to be pleased.

Red picked his hat from the table, looked at the crown, poked it, put it back on the table. "Yesterday Knox and a couple of fellers laid for me. Right at the edge of the timber across the valley. They knocked over my horse and I spilled outa the saddle like I'd been took by the heels and swung. I snuggled down behind the horse and played peek-a-boo. Two hours or more. They wouldn't come out from behind the trees and they used up a pile of shells. Some come clost. Damn clost!"

The judge clucked wonderingly. Red's luck seemed to hold against gunfire.

"Then all of a sudden somebody that had heard the shootin' and crept around up the hill through the timber opened up on them and they ran." Red was speaking directly to the marshal, eying him almost as if half angry. "Then I went up yonder to thank whoever it was, and I found a man with a broke leg layin' there. Knox and them had run without knowin' they'd hit 'im. It was Kilco. His leg was broke up near the hip."

The two Wells-Fargo men rose out of their chairs. One smacked his hands together and the other slapped his partner's back.

"Good boy!" said one, gleefully. "Where is he, Red?"

The judge examined his pipe, felt in the bowl with a little finger and decided against refilling it.

Marshal Vickers asked, crisply soft, "So?"

"So," said Red. "An' I hid 'im, careful!"

THE judge pulled in a deep breath, relaxed a little, glanced toward the marshal, whose stern face was poker-set and a little flushed.

"Just tell us where," said the hoarse Wells-Fargo man in an eager hurry. "We'll go get 'im!"

The marshal flicked a glance aside at his companions, then he asked quietly, "Why did he throw in with *you*, Red?"

"I 'magine it's on account of what I done that day in town." Red picked up his hat again, poked the crown, watched where he poked.

The marshal thought things over. "So you don't intend to give him up, Red?"

Red's eyes lifted somberly. *"Would you?"*

"Not give him up!" said the hoarse Wells-Fargo man with a pop-eyed astonished stare, as if never in his life he had before heard of such a thing.

The judge decided that the pipe needed filling and knocked it out against his heel.

"Why, there's some $5000 reward!" said the hoarse man, putting his face up close to Red's. "You'll be fixed for life!"

"And if you don't, we'll arrest *you!*" said the other, scowling.

"You can't hide him without getting yourself in with the bunch!"

"And we'll have to hold you, Red! You don't want to be in trouble for—"

They batted at Red's ears, as if they had rehearsed how to talk fast together, or almost together; but Red went on not looking at them, almost as if he didn't hear. He was watching the marshal.

The Wells-Fargo men got louder and crowded closer, working on Red; then the judge knocked sharply on the table.

"Gentlemen!" He was using his court-room voice. "Gentlemen, you are unquestionably efficient officers or you would not have been assigned to cooperate with Marshal Vickers in a matter of this importance. I am confident that you are skillful at interrogating, influencing, and persuading criminals. But here your ordinary methods of procedure are of no value. You are dealing

with an honest man! I suggest, gentlemen, that you keep quiet!"

The Wells-Fargo men looked as if they didn't understand, but after a long look at the marshal, who ignored them, they edged back.

The marshal asked, "Is he hurt bad, Red?"

"'Pears to be."

"But he could ride?"

"He stuck in the saddle till I got 'im to where he wanted to go."

"With a broken thigh?"

"I guess so."

The marshal stood up. "Red, he is pretty sure to die without a doctor. A shattered bone is mighty hard to deal with. If you tell me where he is, I'll see that he gets good care."

"If he dies, I'll tell you where he is."

"You won't give him up?"

Red shrugged, shook his head.

The marshal looked at Red for a long time.

"Why have you told me all this if you don't mean to give him up?"

"I promised to tell you if I heard news. I do what I say, allus. I want you to know how it come about if you ever caught me actin' like Kilco's friend. If I get caught, I'll be guilty as hell. Only I don't want you and the judge to think I throwed in with an outlaw. That's why I made up my mind to tell you just how it was."

The marshal pulled down his hat, turned to the door. "Come along, boys. We may as well go."

When they had gone, the judge got up slowly, put out his hand. He was sober about it.

"I am not saying that you are doing right, son. But I am saying that you are being honest!"

Red gave his head a troubled shake. "I'm wonderin' if it was honest of me not to keep my mouth tight shut. I don't like this thing of not knowin' what I orta do!"

RED trotted through the dust to Manning Springs, watered his horse, washed his own face, then squatted in the skeleton shade of the windmill and began to roll a cigarette, still trying to decide whether to go home or turn off toward the Clayton ranch.

He eyed the sun from under his hatbrim, thinking. The city doctor would be out there and Miss Kate could persuade anybody. He felt better at having put his cards on the table, but it was not doing Kilco much of a favor merely to keep him hid, let him suffer and most likely die. After all, that fellow Kilco had grit.

Old man Manning came from the house at a drowsy shuffle.

"Howdy, howdy, boy." He cocked his head, grinned. "Air you that Clark boy from Tulluco?"

"I'm him. Why?"

"Somebody as must've knowed you purty well come by a little while ago, and he pitched a letter up on the shelf and said if that Red Clark of Tulluco comes along, you see as how he gits it. And here you air!" The old fellow looked triumphant.

"For me? A *letter?*"

"That's right," said the old man gleefully. "Come along in. Have a drink and a dish of beans."

"I need 'em. I been so busy thinkin' I forgot to eat."

The old fellow chuckled, swept an arm invitingly and started shuffling back to the 'dobe. "Come along." The dog sniffed at Red's legs.

Before the house Red, who had led his horse along, said, "I may as well take off the saddle if I'm goin' to eat."

The old man stood at the door, looked inside, grinned. Red uncinched the saddle, pulled it off, spread the blanket. The horse shook himself, gave a long vibrating snort.

The old man, waiting beside the door, had a funny grin as if about to play a

"You're gosh a'mighty quick!"

joke. He stepped aside, put a hand on Red's back. "Go right along in, boy."

Red stepped in, scraping his spurs.

It was a one room 'dobe with only two small windows. They were recessed and narrow, and the room was very dim to Red's eyes after the bright sunlight.

The old man paused in the door, peering, and knowing where to look, saw something that made him throw up an arm and yell, *"Look out!"*

His screechy voice had a frantic sound and Red jumped sidelong, keeping his back to the wall. He stumbled over a stool and went down to a hand and knee as a flame-flash cracked at him. His free hand was on a gun's butt when he stumbled. Falling, he drew the gun. He hit the dirt floor where a table, with legs driven solidly into the ground, was before him. A second gun fired from another dark corner.

The old man was cursing at the top of his lungs. The thought whipped through Red's mind, "I'll kill him last!"

and he fired once, twice, again and again, toward the nearest corner from which a gun's flame had struck at him. The only way he could tell if he hit was if the man died; and a vague shape tumbled out of the shadows, sprawled with a soft thud.

Red felt 'dobe dirt splatter on his neck as a bullet smacked into the wall behind him, and he twisted about to face the other corner from which a .45 was smashing at him. Red fired and thought that his gun had blown up. Something sounded as if it had blown up. A deafening roar, such as never came from any .45 filled the room, and a cloud of smoke swirled densely.

Red saw that the old man stood in the dense smoke haze that sifted outward in the draft of the open doorway. He had emptied both barrels of a ten gauge shotgun into the other man.

The old fellow cursed in a high screechy voice. "They seen you outa the winder there, the—" He called them names until he was out of breath. "They said they'd rode with you up in Tulluco, the—" More names, or rather the same. "They said for me to tell you they was a letter and you'd fall over from surprise when you come in an' saw 'em, the—"

"Who are they?"

"I don't know, the—" He had a range of cuss words that would have dazzled a mule skinner.

"How they come to be here and no horses?" If Red had seen horses he would not have walked into the house without knowing who was there."

"They rode in and asked to eat. Said they'd stay till the cool of the evenin'! Put up their hosses, the—"

The old man followed Red across the room. Red stooped, pulled the man he had shot over on his back, bent down. "I don't know this one."

The old man was rubbing his shoulder, but held to the double-barreled shotgun as if it might come in handy for a club as they went to the second man.

"I don't know him either, pop. But I got me a suspicion they was out in the hills yesterday with Frank Knox."

"They was. That's right. I heard 'em say they'd been huntin' yestidy up at Knox's place. Sure that's them. How you know?"

"It was me they was huntin'. Laid for me up in the hills."

"An' they used me to git you into the house, the—"

"I'm not very smart, pop. I might've known nobody would be leavin' me a letter."

"You mayn't be smart, but you're gosh a'mighty quick!"

Red began to prod out shells. "Very slow, pop. I thought I never would get goin'."

"This scatter gun near busted my shoulder, but I wanted 'im to have both bar'ls. And me, I begin to see how you downed three men that shot Mr. Clayton. You don't just shoot—you rip 'em out!"

"And I thought at first that you were in with 'em."

"I knowed it!" the old fellow squawked. "'Course you did! I wuz so mad I'd 've bit 'em to death if this old scatter gun hadn't been on pegs here by the door. I wuz so mad that when I pulled them triggers I give a shove to make the buckshot hit harder, the—"

"I suppose the sheriff 'll have to come out to look at 'em."

"No he won't! No, sir! You jus' help me load 'em in the wagon and I'll take 'em to town, the—"

"Take 'em to the Silver Dollar, pop. Tell Dave Gridger I'm goin' to keep on sendin' in his friends!"

"You don't think Dave had anything to do with tryin' to kill you?" The old fellow left his mouth open.

"If I didn't I'd be an awful fool!"

Red helped put chain harness on a couple of worn-out horses, hitched them

to a wobbly wagon, drove the wagon around to the front of the house. The old man kept up a screechy complaint about having been used to trap Red while they took one body by the arms and legs, carried it saggingly to the wagon, lifted it in. The dog followed, sniffing the drip of blood. They brought the other body, laid it in beside the first.

Red gathered up the dead men's hats, tossed them into the wagon, and the old man brought out a frayed blanket, spread it over the bodies.

"Son," said the old fellow, with a foot on the front wheel, "I wouldn't argy with you. But I don't b'lieve Dave had anything to do with it. Why, him and young Bill Clayton are clost friends. And young Bill, he orta give you the shirt offen his back, and the hide too, on account of how you helped his dad that day!"

"You tell Dave Gridger what I told you. You tell 'em I bet I got more bullets in my belt than he's got friends!"

As the wagon creaked off with the old fellow hunched forward in the seat much like a scarecrow that had been brought from a corn field and stuck up there. Red mused, " 'Pears like the real old fellers in this country are more all right than the young uns. 'Ceptin' the young women."

RED cantered west instead of north, riding through rough timberless country that skirted the foothills.

It was not far from sundown when he came to the Clayton ranchhouse, a low building with a long veranda that had scarlet runner beans straggling up the posts. Two sycamore, gnarled veterans of many hot summers and hard winds, locked branches, and under their shade were two or three rough benches.

Bill Clayton was sitting there, his face masked sullenly. His eyes lifted again and again toward the open door of the house.

He saw a rider coming with a flurry of dust drifting away from under the trot of a black horse, and he knew from afar that it was Red Clark.

Red pulled down to a walk, stopped, waited from behind a steady look for Bill to speak. Bill stood up and said, "Howdy," in a level dull voice as if he wanted to see how Red would take it.

Red's voice was without inflection, returning, "Howdy."

"Light down. I want to have a talk."

Red turned the horse so that he would come out of the saddle facing Bill and dropped the reins, hit the ground. He hitched up his belts with pull of hands and waggle of slim body. "How's your father, Bill?"

"That joltin' was too much for 'im. He's bad off. Expected to die. I tried to keep 'im from comin' home, but he just would! Mighty stubborn. Come over here and set." That was a good deal of talking for Bill to do.

Red went in under the sycamores and sat on a bench.

"Cigar?"

"No, thanks. I don't like cigars unless I'm too drunk to taste 'em." Red pulled out tobacco and paper. He thought that Bill looked a good deal like his father, especially in build, but the son had a sullen shrewdness in his eyes that no old-timer had.

Bill said, "Red, I figger that I owe you an apology."

With paper to his lips ready to be moistened before the final roll, Red looked up. "Me, I figger the same."

"I listened to a lot of liars."

"More'n listened. You believed 'em."

"I was upset over the old man gettin' shot thataway."

Red's match burned the cigarette's tip. He shook out the match, broke the stick between his fingers. "And also you sorta stuck up for Knox that day, too."

"I couldn't believe Knox meant to steal them cows."

"From what I hear, he stole Clayton cows, too. Him and Alvord and some more. You've growed up in this country. Me, I'm a stranger. Funny, *you* never heard."

Bill pondered, mask-like. "I never believed it. The old man accused 'em, but he never got on well with neighbors, even his own men." Bill paused, looked fixedly at Red. "But now I'm changin' my mind. I hear you used to be a foreman for Dunham's outfit."

"Dunham had a dozen foremen."

"From what I hear, that's a hard riding, hard fighting bunch."

"Dunham sure wanted his wages earned."

Bill grinned and came over to the bench. He sat down, turning his face toward Red. "So you think that Knox, and maybe Dave, have pulled the wool over my eyes?"

Red cuffed the ground with a heel. "You heard me speak my piece about this Dave the night after your father was shot."

"I was all too upset to think straight."

"Yeah. And you was some upset, too, that day I brought Knox into town hog-tied. You so much didn't like it that you waggled some fingers toward that gun of yourn."

Bill chewed a while on the cigar, his face sullenly thoughtful. Red wasn't an easy fellow to talk to. Bill explained, "You were a stranger. I've known Dave and Knox a long time. I sided with them."

"What's made you change all of a sudden?"

Bill had the sort of face that is good at poker. Red had the sort of nature that made him a poor poker player. He always called, liking a showdown.

"Maybe I have woke up," said Bill. "I've been putting two and two together. Only you have got to remember that even the judge, who is your friend, thought that you were wrong about Dave."

Red grudgingly admitted, "That is right. But he reads so much po'try he don't know much about human nature."

Bill nudged closer. "Red, how would you like to work for me when the old man dies?"

"Maybe he won't die."

Bill shook his head. "He hasn't got a chance. That joltin' was too much. How would you like to work for me from now on?"

"I got me a job."

"This is a big ranch and you can boss it."

"I like to work for a man that bosses his own ranch."

"You are working for a woman now that don't."

"She is all right. Why don't you boss your own ranch?"

"I want to go away. I've always wanted to go to Europe."

"And you want to leave *me* as the big boss?"

"That's right. That shows how much I've changed my mind about you."

"You," said Red simply, "are a damn fool."

"Why—how you mean?"

"I don't know this country. You've got men that do. And nobody is bein' sensible that goes off and leaves somebody else to run his ranch."

Bill looked at him steadily. "Are you tryin' to say you won't work for *me?*"

"Listen, you. That wasn't what I had in mind, but since you brung it up, I'll say so. I'm a cowhand and a good un. I'm no cattleman. I can boss a trail herd from here to hell, but I don't like to dicker and figger."

"But you were Dunham's range foreman, weren't you?"

"My job was chasin' rustlers. I chased 'em, too. You don't have to dicker with them! And you've been too good friends with Dave Gridger and this Knox not to know they are a bad lot. And if you didn't, you just ain't smart enough to be a good man to work for."

Bill got up. His face had the hot glow of too much blood rushing to his face and he glowered as if any little puff of an impulse would make him do something reckless.

Red spoke softly. "Don't. For one thing, I'd purt-near but not quite let you shoot me before I'd draw a gun with your father dyin' where he could hear. You asked me some questions and I gave you some answers. Besides, you've got no business pickin' a fight. You get too blind mad instead of keepin' cool. For another thing, you've got the wrong kind of a gun to draw real quick. You jerk at ivory grips and if your hand is sweaty you are liable to slip a little. And a little slip of that kind will land you neck-deep in hellfire!"

Bill spread his feet and glowered. He looked mean but there was an alert steadiness in Red's stare that was different than the look in the eyes of other men that Bill knew.

Red studied a while, then went on thoughtfully: "I can't see as there has been any call for you to get all het up unless you have been lyin' about not knowin' Dave and Knox bein' worse than no good. And if you have, you'd better go to town and have a look at a couple of fellers I just met at the Springs on my way up here. Maybe they are friends of yourn, too."

Bill looked as if he wanted to ask Red what he meant, but looked also as if a little afraid of the answer. He glared for a moment or two, then threw down his cigar and walked off, going across toward the bunkhouse.

RED went to the open door of the house and looked through. A fat Indian woman waddled out of shadows and grunted at him.

"I wanta see Miss Clayton. Tell her Red Clark is here."

The stolid Indian stared, then grunted again. He followed her into a big room that had Indian blankets on the puncheon floor, skins and horns on the wall. There were three or four rocking chairs and an organ in the corner.

Red sat down with his hands on his knees, his feet drawn awkwardly back along the rockers to brace himself so the chair wouldn't squeak. He thought the Indian woman had forgotten to tell Miss Kate, but he sat patiently, not stirring.

Miss Kate came in looking tired and sad. A moist handkerchief was crushed tightly in her hand. She smiled woefully and without a word took Red's hand. He could feel that the handkerchief was as wet as if it had been just wrung out. She pressed her lips. "Daddy just died."

Red cleared his throat but he couldn't say anything. Kate pressed her knuckles against her mouth. It was growing so dark that even the bright colored patterns of the blankets under her feet lost their color.

"Almost the last thing he said was for me to trust you. Judge Trowbridge and you. It is strange that you came just as he died."

"How you mean, trust me?"

Kate turned to a window, still holding his hand. They heard a horse galloping. Bill Clayton went by the house. He was leaning forward in the saddle and the horse was heading down the road over which Red had come.

"Where is he going? He doesn't know that Daddy is dead!"

Kate put the handkerchief to her mouth. There was a square beam of evening light coming through the narrow deep window. Red thought that she was the prettiest girl that he had ever seen. He had thought that of lots of girls, but Kate was unlike the others. She was pretty and dainty and proud, yet very sweet.

"Daddy left the ranch to Bill and

me." She was looking straight into the window's light; then she turned.

"Bill and I—" Kate stopped, shook her head.

Red very solemnly said:

"Now you see here! You take your half of what's comin' and let him have his. But sell yours!"

"Why?"

"You do it, quick. If Mr. Clayton said you was to trust me, you'd better. I got more 'n a feelin'. I know."

"But you—you don't understand. I wouldn't say this to anybody else—but I can tell you. Bill has drifted into what is called a bad bunch. Oh, Red," she said earnestly, "Jim Kilco quarreled with Mell Barber because for my sake he was trying to keep Bill straight. Daddy, of course, never knew. He never knew half the things that Bill did, but he knew that something was wrong. And Red, do you think it is horrid of me to be friendly with Jim Kilco?"

"How you come to know him in the first place?"

"I met him when I was riding alone. I was really lost but I didn't mind. I could have found my way back. You know how safe a woman is, always, in the West."

Red said, "Um," feeling that he wasn't sure. "Is that city doctor still here?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Somebody is hurt over at our place. You ain't told me yet why you can't sell your share."

KATE sat down in a rocker and put her hand wearily against her cheek. It was now dark in the room, but Red's eyes were accustomed to the gloom and he looked at her as steadily as if he could see her clearly. Kate dropped her hand into her lap. "Jim told me that when Daddy died all of Bill's friends would be at him like vultures."

"It generally knowed that you would get half the ranch?"

"Yes. Why?"

"I'm just askin'. An' why'll his friends be at him?"

"The bad friends. They know things about him."

Red said, "Um." A long pause. "Then if Bill is smart he will hire him somebody as don't like his friends, and Bill he will go on a trip. Like to Europe, maybe."

Kate stood up and took hold of him. "Will you come to work for us?"

"You sell out your share quick and go on a trip your own self."

"Oh, I can't. The West is like home to me."

"Won't be so much like home with Mr. Clayton dead."

"That is true, but—"

"And Jim Kilco can't take care of you!"

Kate stiffened haughtily, like an offended princess.

"You don't need to get your dander up. When folks I like want my advice, they get it."

"B—but why did you say that about Jim Kilco?"

" 'Cause he's an outlaw on the dodge. Not only is the law after 'im, but his own men, too, on account of bein' in town that day and not shootin' at me when he had a good chance."

"Red! You don't think anything will happen to Jim?" The princess was after all merely a woman anxiously in love.

"We'll talk some more about him in a minute. Right now I'm tellin' you to sell your share, even at a low price. You can't run a cow ranch. Not even half a one!"

"Miss Alvord is running hers, isn't she?"

"No. Besides, if that whole ranch of hern was a handkerchief, it would be big enough to wipe your nose. She's just settin' there. She has got a crazy

cook, a couple of nice kids, and a fool puncher of about my size all drawin' bigger wages than they are worth, even though the cook don't draw none! She don't belong to this country. Neither do you."

"But I am not civilized at all. I am a wild raving savage at heart. I must be because I feel a bitter joy that you killed those men who murdered Daddy!"

"They was Kilco men."

"Oh they weren't! They—why, you know he didn't want Daddy killed."

"I know it. But they was his men, even if he has quarreled with 'em."

"You—have you seen him since?"

"Yesterday."

"Where? What did he say? How is he?"

All of Red's notions about breaking the news delicately flew out of his head, and he told her: "That's why I come to you about a doctor. He is bad hurt."

Kate gripped him, her fingers trembled. "Go on."

"He was hurt helpin' me in a fight up there in the hills. It is his leg. I took him to our ranch. Miss Jane—she knows who he is 'cause I told her, on account of him helpin' me—she wants him to get well and not get caught. He needs a doctor. But if the doctor does any talkin' before folks they are liable to wonder who the wounded man is. So I come to you."

"I can't go. Not with Daddy in the house, dead." She turned around. The stolid Indian was bringing in a lighted lamp and put it on the table.

"Wait," she said.

Red was left alone. He sat down, motionless, in the squeaky rocker. He was thinking about Bill Clayton.

Miss Kate came in with the doctor. He was a tired looking young man with a beard and bright earnest eyes and a soft voice.

He gave Red a thin hand. "I am indeed glad to meet you." The doctor looked gentle and not strong. He had on a low collar and a little black tie.

"Dr. Mills will go with you, Red," she said wearily.

"You know where? I mean about him?"

"Miss Clayton has told me."

"Unless I know you won't talk, I'll have to carry him off somers else. How'll I know that?"

"May I offer you my promise?"

Red studied for a while. "They is a big reward. I got to know," he said stolidly.

The doctor touched his own breast. "I have lately been so near to death myself that my sympathy is rather with condemned men."

Red understood that he had come West for his health and felt better.

HE and the doctor left the Clayton ranch about eight o'clock. They paused at Manning Springs. No one was there and Red did not tell what had happened.

The moon came up. Dr. Mills said that he loved this country, that it was giving health back to him. The tangy smell of the pines was like wine.

A lamp threw its pale glow out of the ranchhouse doorway. Jane came to the door, hearing horses. The cook got up, shuffling barefooted. The two kids lay as if dead.

"Coffee," said Red to the cook. "And lots of it. I keep forgettin' to eat."

"And hot water, please," Dr. Mills added.

He took Jane's hand and held it as if there were understanding between them, instantly. Whatever he may have thought of dainty Kate Clayton's concern over an outlaw, he had not expected a woman of Jane Alvord's culture to be living in a ranchhouse with five men, one with a price on his head. And Jane recognized at once that this young doctor was the type of physician

accustomed to the homes of cultured persons. The weariness of her long vigil had done away with all trace of reserved old-maidishness. She was merely a young and very tired woman who had been nursing a feverish man.

Kilco raised himself on an elbow, stared suspiciously. Red bent over, said quietly, "Miss Kate sent him."

Kilco's body relaxed. He forced a smile that was half grimace, lifted a hand toward Jane. "She is all wore out, doc. Give her something first."

Red hurried out to the doctor's horse and brought in saddlebags.

"Fortunately," said Dr. Mills, "I brought surgical instruments."

"The pain is bad," Kilco told him, "But I'm more afraid of bein' crippled. Will I be?"

Red held up the lamp. Dr. Mills studied Kilco's haggard face, then laid back the wet dressing and found Kilco's leg blue-bruised and red. The skin was swollen as tight as if about to burst.

"Some water, please. In a glass or cup," said the doctor. He was gentle and at ease, as if he knew exactly what to do.

Red gave the lamp to Jane and went for water. In passing the cook who knelt before the stove and puffed at the flame, Red thumped his shoulder. "Better cook a whole cow and make a tub of coffee. My appytite's the biggest thing about me."

The doctor took a bottle from his bag and shook out some black pills. With the cup of water in his hand, he stooped to Kilco. "Take two of these, please."

Kilco raised on an elbow, obediently swallowed the pills with a sip of water.

"You will feel better in a few minutes."

In twenty minutes he was asleep.

"Opium," said Dr. Mills. "And exhaustion."

An hour later the cook and Red and Jane and the doctor sat drinking coffee. The doctor was very grave. He did not say so, but they understood that Kilco was in danger of his life.

"Well," Red told him, "you'd better be makin' a start."

Jane protested, vaguely shocked by Red's abruptness. "Red, how can you? He is tired and needs sleep."

"All true, but he ain't goin' to get it here. He's got to be down at the Springs by sun-up. If somebody knows he's been up here, folks'll wonder. People are awful curious. I'll shake one of the boys outa his bunk and send 'im along. We didn't bring a doctor up here to fix Kilco so he would be caught an' hung."

It was plain to anybody as Jane and the doctor parted that they liked each other.

"I shall try to arrange to come back soon," said the doctor. Jane stood wearily in the doorway and watched him ride off with Bobby.

Red had the feeling that she was wondering how soon he would come riding back.

MR. BACKMAN was sitting in the shadow of a rock near his cabin with the rifle on his knee, and as soon as Red saw him he took off his hat. "Just so you won't have to waste a bullet, dad!"

The grizzly old fellow stood up and waved a welcoming hand.

Red got down and they shook hands. "You been away?"

"I went up in the mountains to get a b'ar. There is nothing like b'ar grease to keep your joints limber in the winter."

"Things has happened. I come to tell you . . ."

Red told the whole story, omitting only that Marshal Vickers was on Kilco's trail. When he finished there was a long silence. The old man twiddled with the bottom fringe on his buckskin shirt.

"I'm not again law, not much. But I don't need a sheriff and a judge to tell me who to like. Jim is a bad enough fellow, but I don't figger that he is mean. As for Katy Clayton—you would think to look at her that she had more sense

than to be in love with a fellow like him."

"I'll bet you," said Mr. Backman, "that inside of two days Katy will be over for to visit her neighbor, this Miss Alvord."

Red put in most of the day riding and when he got back to the ranch it was late in the afternoon. He was unsaddling outside the corral when he looked around and saw three men coming through the timber on the rise, a quarter of a mile off. He stared long enough to be sure that he knew that, and swore a lot as he jerked off the saddle, pulled the bridle and ran his horse into the corral.

As he ran for the house, he tried to think how in the world it would be possible to keep Marshal Vickers and those Wells-Fargo men out of the house. If they got inside—Kilco would surely think he had been turned in for the reward.

Red lurched with a clattering stumble through the back door. Cook was kneading dough in a dishpan and turned with dough stringing down from his fingers. "What bit you?"

"Vickers and them two fellers are ridin' in for supper again!"

Cook stood open-mouthed, his hands held out from his body and dough stringing from wide-spread fingers.

Kilco had heard, and he tried to sit up. His pain-sunken eyes glittered. "*Vickers!* You—damn you—"

"If I wanted to give you up, I wouldn't be purtendin' I didn't!"

Cook worked his hands to keep the stringy dough from dripping about the floor and peered through the front doorway. He faced about with a squeaky, "They are comin'!" as if anybody doubted it.

"Give me a gun!" Kilco snarled. "I won't be taken! You sold me out!" He was half crazy with the pain, and he had the fear that is never out of an outlaw's heart, the fear of pretended friends who want to get a reward.

He glared at Red murderously. "If it's the last thing I ever do, I'll kill you!"

Red cursed him. He cursed in a way that made Jane draw back and shudder. His words bit like flame. "You've rode with men you didn't trust so long you don't know about people that keep their word! Now damn your soul, you do like I say or you'll be drug out of here and hung!

"I ain't bein' your friend—I'm just payin' a debt. And you do like I say, or I'll lay a gun over your head an' keep you quiet so we can do it! You hear me? You cock-eyed fool, if I wanted the money, I wouldn't rig up no shenanegan like purtendin' to have men just ride in. You take some of them pills so you'll lay quiet when me and the cook poke you over here behind the blankets of her bunk. They won't look there unless you start groanin' and carrying on."

"I won't take pills! I want to know what's goin' on! Give me a gun, so—"

"You won't get no gun. If anybody's goin' to get shot, I'd rather it'd be you than Vickers."

Kilco glared, still suspicious. It was almost as if Red spoke a strange language.

"You orta take pills, 'cause yankin' you over there'll near tear you to pieces and if you squeak and groan, you'll be caught!"

"I'll lay quiet," said Kilco, still distrustful but somehow submissive. Red, when aroused, was as fierce as any outlaw.

Red threw up the curtaining blankets on their rope, revealing some of Jane's garments hung on the wall above the bunk. They were white frilly things.

"We got to hurry! Cook, you and Jane get that pan and them rags outa sight! His boots, too. And that bottle of pills!"

Jane swooped at the bottle, thrust it down inside of her waist. "Oh, hurry!"

Red took hold of Kilco. "This is goin' to hurt."

"Hurt an' be damned! I'm trusting

you." There was something almost distrustful in the way he said it.

"I can help," said Jane and reached out, not knowing just how.

"Cook, dough or no dough, you'll have to carry his good leg! Miss, you hold the other 'n. Now, Kilco, put your arms up tight around my neck and hang on. It's goin' to be hard!"

Red heaved. Kilco groaned. He was a big man and all dead weight. Red was slender but rawhide tough. Kilco had shattered nerves, and the pain was agonizing. He groaned between clenched teeth.

"Shut up!" Red snapped and gasped for breath himself.

They were staggering with Kilco clear of the bunk where he had been lying when the slow *trop trop trop* of horses were heard.

Red was overburdened with Kilco's weight. He held on desperately and tugged, staggered on the peg heels, and the long-shanked spurs jangled against the hard dirt floor. A cry escaped Kilco's clenched teeth. They all staggered near to Jane's bunk. Red breathed anxiously, expecting challenging voices from the doorway. He heard, or thought he heard, booted footsteps. Anxiety struck him like a blast of fear; with a desperate last heave from sweating slipping hands, he got Kilco's shoulder on the bunk's edge, roughly pushed Jane and the cook aside, gave him a roll and hissed warning, "Not a peep outa you!" then jerked down the blankets.

Red sucked in a deep breath, looked toward the doorway, knew that he heard footsteps now. He jumped at the cook, caught him by the hair and whispered savagely, "Come on, damn you! We got to make 'em think we're havin' a fight, else they'll be suspicious of how we are flustered!"

Cook put feeling into his response because the pull on his thin hair hurt. He smacked Red's face with a sticky palm.

Shadows blocked the door as three men looked in. Cook was striking and scratching and swearing. Red, breathing hard, seemed to be getting the worst of it. Jane backed up against the blanket curtains, instinctively putting herself between these strangers and the concealed outlaw. She looked frightened.

Cook had found that Red would not hit him and that made it nice, particularly with the two Wells-Fargo men looking on and speaking approval.

"I ain't scairt of you!" cook squalled and came at Red with doughy fingers claw-like. "You ain't nothin' but just another stray cowboy to me!"

Red smacked him hard with an open palm, and cook sat down, hard.

Red looked around at Marshal Vickers, who was not smiling.

The marshal took off his hat, stepped forward. He said sternly to Jane, "Miss Alvord, I am United States Marshal Vickers. I have learned that Jim Kilco is in hiding up here somewhere. Do you know anything about him?"

(To be continued)

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TRADITIONS OF THE DEEPWATERMEN

• & WINDAS •

SHANGHAIED

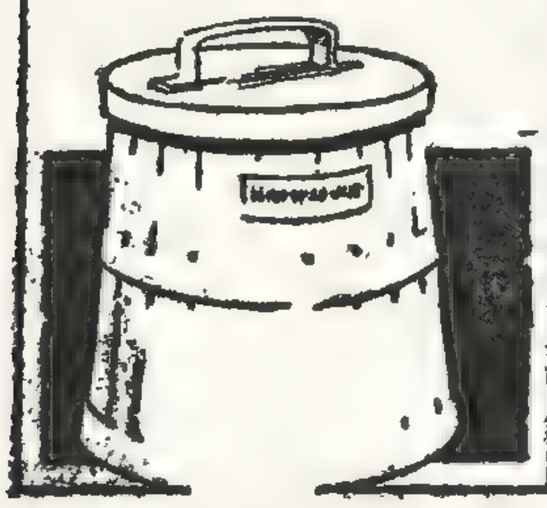
A word coined from the name of the town where the unsavory custom originated. When masters of the tea-clippers were short of crews, they would pay the owner of the dives where sailors were carousing to put knock-out drops in the seamen's drinks, then kidnap them aboard ship.

PILOT

From the Dutch words, PIJ LUIT meaning 'Lead-Line'. Yet strangely enough the name was conferred only on those who knew local waters well enough to direct a vessel *without* the use of the lead line.

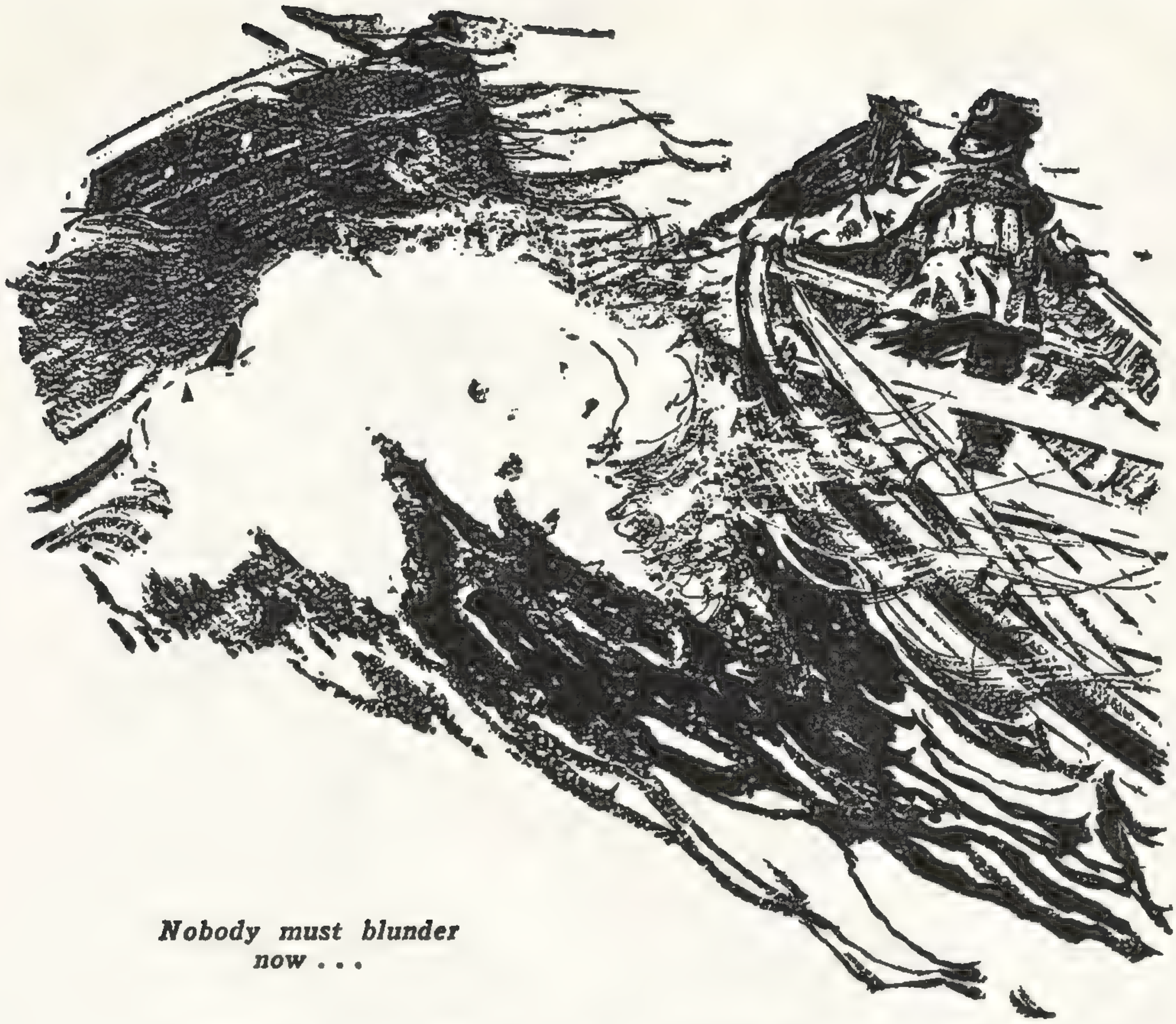
HARNESS CASK

The ship's meat-barrel received its nickname from old-time sailors who swore that the meat was cut from worn out horses, and that the extra tough pieces were bits of the harness.



BLACK NECKERCHIEF

Every time a U. S. sailor dons his black neckerchief he unconsciously mourns the death of Lord Nelson.



Nobody must blunder now . . .

THE OLD WART

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

THE sea was still a raging, leaping turmoil of crazy water. In the gusts the veering wind kept hitting gale force.

Hours ago the *Mary K. Mead's* decks had been swept, and now the old tramper's churning pumps were taking a good bit of the steam she needed to keep her going on her dubious rescue mission.

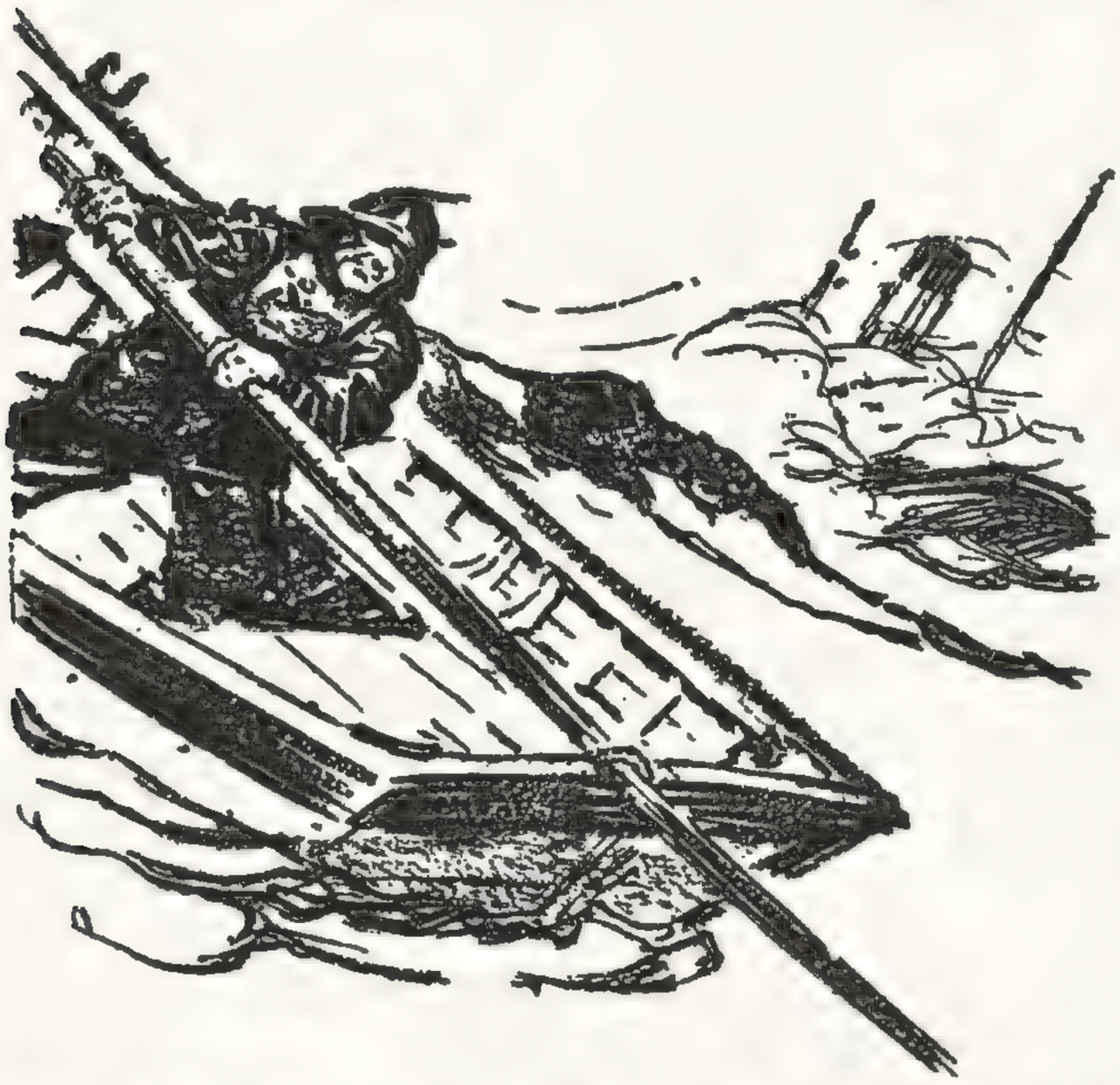
But what burned up Mr. Graw was the skipper. There the confounded dodo sat in his deck chair, jammed in the undamaged port wing of the bridge. With gray eyebrows joined in intent concentration he was tinkering away with his penknife at that blasted full-rigged ship model he was going to stick into a bottle for his grandson. Mr. Graw snorted and staggered into the battered, salt-crusted wheelhouse to throw a mean look at the red-eyed Starkey.

"Keep her on it, you!" he growled as the helmsman jerked the wheel over convulsively.

"She's on it to the quarter-point, sir!" Starkey replied promptly.

"Yes?" Mr. Graw was flatly unconvinced. He stamped out again. From sheer habit he started toward the starboard side of the bridge but stopped abruptly. Ten hours before a dirty, cross-grained lump of sea had carried away the outer ten feet of the starboard wing.

It wouldn't have griped Mr. Graw if the old walrus had been scrimshawing away like that for the purpose of calming the men on his laboring ship. He had heard of that sort of thing. But Graw knew as well as he knew his own shirt that the stupid old wart was working away because he had figured on getting that ship rigged and in the bottle



for the kid this trip. And he was on the bridge not because of any high motive of duty but because it was a good place to dry out after the incessant, drenching torrents of rain.

As for the men, they didn't need calming. A hurricane, or even a blow with winds approaching hurricane intensity in the center, as they preferred to say at the Weather Bureau, is a macerating, flattening, gizzard-jerking affair. It makes the still bottom of the sea even four thousand, six hundred and sixty-two fathoms down over Nares Deep north of Puerto Rico seem an enticing rest cure to anybody who has survived its rage. No, the man didn't need quieting. They were as quiet as wet tissue paper, even the ones who hadn't been hurt.

"Dumb!" muttered Mr. Graw. "Too dumb to know he's alive! And he's all we got to command this leaky basket in a rescue job. Master! Captain David Weston! How a hunk o' suet like that ever got by them for a master's ticket—"

He shrugged this responsibility off his shoulders and resumed his staggering pace. Beside the old man's chair he paused and cast a melancholy eye down on the well deck where reposed a winch which must have weighed all of four tons. A sea had torn that winch loose from its bed plates on the forecastle head and swept it down into the well, crumpling and puncturing the steel deck where it hit. Now, festooned with heavy chain and wire rope, it rode the confused sea, awaiting with mute malevolence a wild roll or sharp pitch to break loose and cut another ruthless swath of destruction. That was just one of the things that had happened to the *Mary K. Mead* during the dusting she had taken.

"That stowaway with a third officer's ticket looks about due for relief, sir," Mr. Graw reported resentfully, jerking his head to indicate the helmsman. "She's sort of cranky in this sea."

He hunched his own shoulders wearily and yawned with cavernous violence and much meaning. "Sort of queer, ain't it, with two officers laid up, that we should have a stowaway in her qualified to stand a bridge watch? If I should cave in, I mean, sir."

Captain Weston's lips were moving, his eyes fixed judiciously on the minute mizzen topgallant yard of the model. But he didn't notice the hint to give Mr. Graw a break.

"Take him off the wheel," he said, and gestured aft. "We don't need him on the bridge. D'you think he can bear a hand on that boat job?"

Beside the fiddley on the boat deck a couple of bedraggled men were at work patching up the outboard strakes of the port lifeboat from the splintered remnants of the starboard boat.

"He could bear a tongue on it; I dunno about a hand," the mate muttered, much disgruntled. "He's a watch officer, y'know."

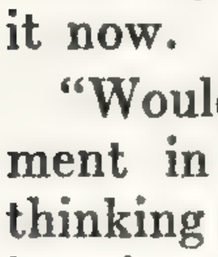
Not for the first time he lifted his eyes resentfully toward the gray horizon.

"We would have to be the ship nearest this sinking tug!" he exploded. "They'd ought to keep tow boat men inside the harbors!"

Captain Weston looked at his feet. He could see them better when he was sitting in his chair, Mr. Graw reflected savagely. But standing or sitting he liked to refer sensible remarks to his feet, especially if he intended to cap them by some silly question. He did it now.

"Would ye say it was an improvement in our luck to have all hands thinking about the tug *MacGregor* sinking instead of ourselves?" he asked, lifting his eyes.

The mate snorted. "He's too dumb to know good luck from bad!" he muttered under his breath and headed for the ladder to hunt for an able-bodied man. They were scarce on the *Mary;* she had even slung a couple of cat-footed firemen against their own firedoors in the course of her gyrations.



MR. GRAW found a man snoring whole-heartedly on the floor below his bunk in the forecastle and routed him out. It took some doing, but Mr. Graw was accustomed to doing things.

"Mark my words, I'll be taking over from that guy some day to save the ship," he told himself as he propelled his grumbling captive up the ladder. Spray stung his neck like buckshot; the ladder jumped out from under his feet. He stumbled on.

"Get down on the fiddley, Starkey!" he snapped at the tall, stringy man at the wheel. He shoved his new recruit behind the spokes. "There's a stiff job on that boat."

"I'm an excellent carpenter, sir. I—"

Starkey stopped and dodged discreetly out the door as red riot showed in the mate's face. Mr. Graw completed the awakening of the muttering A. B., bawling the course in his ear. When he whistled down to the engineroom somebody below swore at him fluently but briefly. He gave that up. Things would be lively down there with all that steam going to the pumps.

"It's more than a few rivets sheered," he told himself. "The way she was workin' it's a wonder she didn't break her back."

He stuck his head in the chartroom for a look at their position on 2318. A good two hours' steaming to the tug at the nine-knot gait they were hitting The second mate, groggy from a crack on the head, never stirred on the settee. In the radio shack abaft the chartroom the kid operator, flushed with excitement, was having himself a swell time with his key.

Mr. Graw returned to his major problem on the bridge.

"Where'll I get a boat's crew on this hospital ship?" he asked the old man despairingly.

Captain Weston grunted in surprise. "Is the boat repaired?"

"It ain't—but I was just askin' you, sir," Mr. Graw replied with murderous politeness. He passed through the wheelhouse to make sure the new helmsman had her and then descended wearily to the boat deck. A sign of life showed there. Mr. Graw paused in the background, leaning against a ventilator.

Young Ed Reed was just staggering backward under the competent motivation of Able Seaman Ansorge's oaken fist. His lip was bleeding.

"You do it my way, kid," Ansorge rasped, glaring past Reed at Starkey. "I'm tellin' you how, not that long thin bag o' wind!"

"Don't let that big ox intimidate you, Reed!" Starkey snapped. "I'm telling you how a man with any brains would—"

Ansorge, cock of the forecastle, brought his fist down like a club on the gunwale of the lifeboat. Ansorge's face was knotted up into an unpleasing replica of his granite fist as he faced the younger seaman.

"A-ar!" he growled. "So Mister Starkey's a carpenter, too, huh? Pick up that chisel an' forget that officer stuff. A guy's got to be a man before he's a mate. If you ever get onto the bridge, Reed, it'll be because you crawled there on your belly like Starkey must ha' done!"

MR. GRAW waited to see if Ed Reed would start anything. It had been a triangle of discord from the start. Ever since Ansorge had pulled Starkey by main force from under the cover of that same lifeboat off Guiana this sort of thing had been going on—Starkey talking about his ticket, Ansorge waving his fist and both of them giving orders to Reed. That battle to run Reed was because the kid had stuck his neck in between them in the first place.

"I got a ticket!" Starkey had cried as the huge Ansorge had dragged him toward the bridge to report a stowaway. "I got a ticket—I'm a third officer down on his luck. Let me walk, mate!"

Reed had blocked Ansorge's triumphal progress.

"Let him up!" he had demanded. "Don't you hear him? He's got a ticket!"

It was the first flash of spirit Mr. Graw had noted in Reed for two trips. A solidly built, straw-haired, hopeful kid with a high school diploma, Ed Reed had tackled the old man on the pier in Brooklyn. Weston had fallen for him; the old man had even told Graw the chunky kid struck him as a likely candidate for a bridge watch, bent on working his way aft, old style. through the hawse pipe.

But it hadn't turned out that way. Ansorge—and forecastle life—had been grinding the big ideas out of Ordinary Seaman Reed. Probably some dim, fading vision of gold lace had been reawakened in the youngster by Starkey's mention of his ticket and that was why he had halted Ansorge.

"Out o' the way, you!" Ansorge had warned Reed, shoving him aside and dragging the lanky Starkey on forward. "He may be a third officer to you but he's the cook's cookie to me!"

But Starkey's voice served him better than his muscles. He had appealed from Mr. Graw's ruling to the old man himself.

"As one deck officer to another, sir, you ain't goin' to make a potato-peelin' peggy out o' me!" Starkey had urged, exhibiting a blackened, much creased third mate's license. "Stowaway I am, sir, and I won't be tirin' you with my misfortunes. Make me work, sir—but on deck, sir, like a seaman, not in no galley!"

"The hands will eat better if the cook gets him, sir," Mr. Graw had told the captain privately. "Hall's a good hash-slinger but lazy. With somebody to peel his spuds— The galley's where this fellow belongs."

"He's got a ticket, sir, a third mate's license," Ed Reed spoke up, lifting his head to stare at the bridge.

Captain Weston contemplated the young man a moment, then ducked his head and consulted his feet for a longer

time. Finally he had spread his elbows on the bridge rail and squinted at length at the attenuated body of Starkey.

"He'll be in your watch with Reed and Ansorge, Mr. Graw," he decided. "There might be some use in him."

That had ended the argument—and started the triangle of trouble. As a seaman Starkey had made the grade in the forecastle. But not even a hurricane —the tail of one, anyhow—or a rush at nine knots to a sinking ship had interfered with the discord.

Right now, beside the sad looking lifeboat, Ed Reed was taking Ansorge's blow without active answer. He touched his bleeding lip and moved it gingerly. About as good officer material, Mr. Graw reflected savagely, as a hunk of dough in the hands of a couple of rival cooks. The forecastle—Mr. Graw had served his two years in one—had downed him. And between them his two advisers had finished the flattening. Plenty of big-headed kids up forward had been pounded into realizing where they belonged. They tried men in the forecastle—tested them out to stand the gaff and the guff, to use muscles and to use wits, to get by with your shipmates and to get by with your job.

Since the skipper had sounded off about Ed Reed being officer stuff Mr. Graw had mentioned to him that Reed was having a rough passage in the forecastle.

"That kid's taking it green over the bows, sir, from the two of 'em an' anybody else that feels like throwing his fist around," Mr. Graw informed the old man.

The senile old wart had just looked moony.

"Can't you lend him a handkerchief, Mr. Graw?" he had muttered and gone on with his scrimshawing.

Now, as all hands knew, Reed was saving his money to try the other and easier route to a ticket—a course in a nautical schoolship.

Mr. Graw snorted and emerged from behind the ventilator to approach the smashed boat.

"Come on! Come on!" he growled. "That boat's goin' to hit the water in a couple of hours, an' you'll be in her with me, Ansorge, or I don't know men. She'll handle better in this seaway if she's got more planking on her."

Ansorge grinned formidably. "An' she'll handle better without no cargo o' chatter, sir. I said pick up that chisel, you broken Reed, you!"

SLOWLY Ed Reed obeyed. In response to Mr. Graw's commanding gesture Starkey approached the lifeboat's gunwale, swaying wildly as she pitched. Mr. Graw told them. The three men got busy.

Casting a look of deep personal distrust at the boat, Mr. Graw returned to the lurching bridge. He swore softly as he perceived that the old goat was still on the mizzen topgallant yard. Then he looked at the sea.

It was all of a breach, that sea, and there was no sense to it. The wind had been shifting rapidly, hauling around too fast to make even a predictable cross sea. The deep blue water, laced with hissing foam, lumped up mountain high and broke in white thunder as two or more masses of water came rushing upon each other from opposite directions. Nothing you could figure, just crazy water and a wooden lifeboat that had already suffered severely under the ruthless blows of the sea.

Mr. Graw planted both hands heavily on the bridge rail. When she lifted he stared at the blank horizon ahead. The wind was as warm as soup, but when it played on the mate's wet head it seemed quite cold.

The plunging *Mary* hit the *MacGregor* practically on the nose. She had been out of San Juan too short a time to have lost her reckoning when the

twister had struck. A little to westward of her reported position she was, but not enough to keep her low hull under the horizon to eyes up on the monkey bridge.

She was no dramatic nor tragic picture, that tug. Just a drowned rat of a ship and the wonder of it was that she had stayed afloat this long. Buoyancy is no special attribute of tugs, even the sea-going variety like the *MacGregor*. She lay like a rock in the sea. Most of the time only her pilot house and stack seemed above water. When a sea hit her nothing at all showed through the geyser of spray.

Save for the *Mary* the towboat was alone in the sweep of the saw-toothed horizon. Sadly Mr. Graw made sure of that, and then widened the horizon by consulting Sparks. Nothing else was within three hours of them. And three hours—

"Well, sir, I can take Ansorge and maybe Starkey and three more," Mr. Graw reckoned brusquely. "Would you say any o' the black gang had ever swung an oar, barring boat drills?"

Captain Weston, who was standing up, thrust his head forward to squint past the round of his stomach at his feet. Then he looked up suddenly.

"What would ye say yourself, Mr. Graw?" he inquired rather dryly.

"That's what I think of 'em, too, sir," the mate admitted. "Well—"

He rubbed his head. Aft by the repaired port lifeboat Ansorge, with his cork jacket already fastened on, was hustling about. Ed Reed was arranging frapping lines around the davit falls to steady the boat when they lowered and Starkey was yelling for somebody to bring up a couple of mattresses to hang over the side as fenders.

The wind was blowing harder; it always does. It moaned in foreboding notes through the funnel guys. A warning and a dirge together.

They were getting close to the tug. Mr. Graw slipped on his jacket. His eyes fell with distrust on his commander. For the next hour this scrimshawing dodo would hold his life in his hand, like a penknife.

"Getting back's the—" he started to tell the old man.

"We can't spare a boat crew and my ship can't spare you, Mr. Graw," Captain Weston interrupted. "Not with my second mate suffering from concussion and my third strapped in his bunk with a broken leg and God knows what."

"You mean—"

"This is a job for a couple of men in the lifeboat, with the ship holding onto her with a one-inch Manila line."

Mr. Graw nodded, much relieved. "I think you're right, sir," he agreed. He dropped off his jacket. He hadn't reckoned there was that much sense left in the old wart.

He descended to the boat deck.

"This is a job for a boat on a line, men," he told them. "I want two volunteers to handle her. What do you say?"

"I'm one, sir," Ansorge said promptly.

There was a moment of silent appraisal on the *Mary's* boat deck. Most of those sea-mauled men, as Graw knew well, would have taken a chance on pulling an oar with an officer in the sternsheets to tell them what to do. But sharing a boat on a line in that sea with just Ansorge, whose fist was bigger than his brain, that was something else.

Ed Reed looked at Starkey, who had a ticket. Starkey was already looking at him. Neither man spoke.

"How about him?" demanded Ansorge impatiently. He pointed a thick finger at Starkey. "He's an officer—on paper—and the best man in this hooker, so he tells me. Officer material, that's what we need on this boat ride!"

Starkey licked his lips.

"Officer material," Ed Reed repeated suddenly, with a glance toward the spray-buried tug. "That's what you need to get those men off her."

Ansorge laughed derisively and arched his chest. The muscles bulged out on his arms and neck.

"Well, I'll have to admit it," Starkey said, most reluctantly and yet rather quickly, "I've got a sprained wing." He covered his right wrist tenderly with his left. "Twisted it securing that winch down on the well deck, an' my trick at the wheel finished it. I won't jam up a rescue just because I want to be a lousy hero. If the kid here wants to go in the boat I can't rightly stand in his way. I'm out o' luck."

Mr. Graw had seen Starkey using both wrists to fend off when the boat on the davits had swung at him. And Reed had seen it, too. Graw shrugged his shoulders without comment. These things are between a man and himself in the sweat and wakefulness of long night hours.

Reed had taken his eyes off Starkey and now was in front of the mate.

"I'll go," he said, glaring hard at Ansorge. "I'll go, sir."

"Two will be enough," the mate said sharply as a Swede with a rag around his bloody forearm stepped up. He shook his head at a grizzled old man who was switching at his sleeve and pounding his chest with a gray, skinny fist. "I'll need you tending the line on deck, White. Two will be enough.

"Two—if they was both me," Ansorge agreed. "I—"

"Pipe down!" snapped Mr. Graw. "Come on, a couple of you!" He broke out his coil, twelve hundred feet of snaky, new yellow Manila, while the *Mary* steamed around the tug, running out oil.

WITH his oil slick laid, the old man maneuvered her to windward of the wreck. Her engines stopped, she lay wallowing heavily. Three hundred yards away, her drift matched that of the tug closely, but the old man didn't move very far from the engine room telegraph.

Mr. Graw explained signals and outlined the plan, while the two volunteers, ignoring each other, listened in silence. Then they climbed into the boat. Ansorge went aft, to the post of command.

Starkey stood by the gunwale, ready with the others to handle her davit falls.

"Don't be scared, dearie!" he shouted at Ansorge.

Ansorge made as if to grab up an oar but Mr. Graw's face stopped him.

With Reed standing by the forward davit tackle and Ansorge the after, Mr. Graw gingerly lowered the patched boat. Both men got their falls unhooked as an oil-blunted sea lifted the boat. She drifted clear, with Mr. Graw's sharp eyes directing his little gang paying out the line foot by foot.

The rope from the *Mary* came to Reed through the bow ringbolt of the boat. He had secured it by a hitch around a thwart further aft, with a hundred feet of his end coiled down in the bottom. Aft, Ansorge gripped his long steering oar with both his leathery hands and waited grimly for the wind to hit.

The first gust, whistling down over the *Mary's* super-structure, struck the lifeboat and at once the line tautened.

"Hold it!" Mr. Graw yelped. The puff straightened out the boat so that it tailed off down-wind with the tautening line lifting out of the water. "Ease away slowly!"

Bow to the *Mary* and stern to the tug, the boat drifted to leeward. Ansorge toiled on his oar, keeping her head to the wind. He was helped by the strain on the line, hindered by the erratic seas that struggled to thrust through the blanketing oil like a field of living giants buried under thin green sod.

Mr. Graw's job was to glue his eyes to the boat and keep the line to it taut at all times. But once he jerked his head toward the bridge as he felt the

tremor of the deck under him. The old man had been compelled to go ahead on the engines a trifle to keep his position dead to windward of the tug.

Mr. Graw grunted. Using power meant that the driving wind had more and the sea less of a grip on the *Mary* than on the tug. That would complicate things; the drift of the two ships would be different.

"An' it'll raise hell with our oil slick," Mr. Graw added, under his breath. He peered through his glasses at the tug. He could see no signs that she was using oil.

Cursing the kinks, the men on the *Mary's* deck gave the boat scope as steadily as they could. Starkey worked hard, yelping out encouragement and counsel.

"We're doin' it, lads!" he cried. And once he laid hold of his wrist and groaned. But nobody looked at him.

The trouble started when the pitching boat drew near the tug. Through his glasses Mr. Graw saw Reed raise an arm overhead, signaling "Hold on!" Then he hustled aft to help Ansorge keep her bow on in the chaotic sea. They were out of the slick.

For a full minute the two men fought to control the boat under the new conditions. Their bodies writhed together this way and that. Graw could sense the strain of muscles; the tensity of hot-breathed, contorted faces, the quick short words as to what to do. The crucial time had come. Nobody in ship or boat must blunder now.

Mr. Graw blinked sweat and water out of his eyes. Four arms worked together on that long, bending oar out over the lifeboat's stern. Graw stared on through the lenses at Reed. The boy would have no chance of getting forward long enough to slack away or haul in his end of the line. The whole delicate job of easing her in close to the tug lay between Reed's signaling arms and Mr. Graw's watching eyes.

The old man had stopped the engines. The ship dragged and jerked the line as she rolled and plunged. Graw held the straining rope. The worst thing would be if she drifted down on the tug and slacked off the line too quickly. The slightest touch against the water-logged wreck would be disastrous to the leaping lifeboat.

Abruptly then Ed Reed took his right hand off the steering oar. He thrust out his arm sidewise and waved it imperatively.

"Slack! Slack away!" Mr. Graw commanded through his teeth. He could see no water between boat and tug. But that gesture demanded scope in a hurry. He gave it to them.

The hand shot up overhead to call a halt.

Mr. Graw chewed his lips. Next instant he grunted in some relief. His salty, stinging eyes saw that the boat had opened a slit of water astern of the tug. She was still clear.

SOMETHING flicked up out of the lifeboat. It was a heaving line. It sailed toward the tug, jerking and unwinding through the air. It slapped down across the pilot house. Somebody grabbed at the bight of it. The hands moved like striking snakes.

They had it! The tug's man hauled in with fierce urgency. A cork jacket ploughed through the sea toward the stern of the *MacGregor.*

Abruptly Reed's hand signaled again for slack. A moment later he stopped it.

"She's lying a bit to leeward o' the tug," Graw decided. "She might have some shelter, just a little— Ah!"

The men aboard the tug had not been backward. Already one was in the jacket and over the side. As well as he could Graw followed his progress, made with arms flailing, through the leaping seas. Reed was hauling him

in; Ansorge was still on the steering oar.

The towboat man's head showed black against the lifeboat's white side; Reed bent and heaved him in on the gunwale. One! Mr. Graw followed that same maneuver, again and again, with never failing taut vigilance. Four. Five. The tug men in the lifeboat were bailing her now. They were throwing lots of water. They had exchanged one bit of wreckage for another. Was the boat lifting more sluggishly? Five! What was this? Two men, grabbing the line together, leaped from the reeling pilot house into the sea.

The tug's black funnel was tilting; Reed was signaling vigorously .

"Slack! Slack!" raged Mr. Graw. "Throw it over!"

"Give 'em slack, boys!" cried Starkey. "Handsomely! Slack!"

The floundering lifeboat drifted with horrible deliberation away from that sliding funnel. Most precisely the stack tilted further; then suddenly pilot house and funnel eased quietly down under the sea. No visible eddy; the wind was making fuss enough on the surface.

The lifeboat pitched dizzily; two figures, sprawling, spread-eagled against her side, were hauled in. Six. Seven.

"And here's where the job starts," Mr. Graw said grimly. "Getting 'em this far up-wind in that busted peach basket is a trick."

He faced his gang. "If one o' you sons takes an inch of slack before I give the word I'll break you into five pieces," he promised passionately. "Now ease her in— Slack! Slack away!" he added hastily, at an emphatic signal from the boat.

Groaning, he watched his line go trickling over the *Mary's* side into the sea.

"Hold on!" he cried. He waited, but no signal to haul in came from the tossing boat. He studied it vigilantly. There was plenty of action on board—the rescued men were still bailing, some with their hands. But no signal to haul.

"Well, o' course they want us to haul," Mr. Graw muttered. "That damn kid's forgot. Come in on that line— softly, now. No! 'Vast haulin'!"

He flung the sweat off his face with a jerk of his head and raised his glasses again. Reed was up in the bow, and he had an ax raised threateningly above the line where it came through the ringbolt. He was ready to cut the rope as it tautened.

"Hell's fire!" snarled the mate.

From the bridge the old man hailed him.

"What's wrong, Mr. Graw?"

Graw lowered the steaming binoculars.

"Must be tangled up with some line or wire from the tug," he reported, scrubbing at the lenses. "He won't let us haul in an inch."

HE ROARED his tribulations while the old man stared at his feet. He clapped his glasses to his eyes and swore as he caught the glint of the ax.

"There's no tug for us to foul, Mr. Graw," the skipper decided. "He wants us to work down to him instead o' haulin'."

Mr. Graw looked in startled realization at clear blue water, plenty deep, between them and the boat.

"Ugh!" he grunted. "I was goin' to suggest that, sir," he called hastily.

"Keep that line clear o' the screw when you ease it," Captain Weston warned. "Bend on another length."

They slacked off their line to give them room to maneuver. Going ahead and astern in short surges with the helm over, they craw-fished down toward the boat.

Mr. Graw hauled in what came but took no strain on the line. Reed was still gripping his ax. The boat drifted. As the line to which it lay in the spurt-

ing seas grew shorter the steering efforts of Ansorge and one of the towboat men became more difficult. Ed Reed still held his place in the bow. The others bobbed about incessantly, bailing with fury.

Mr. Graw swore in an undertone but kept the line slack. Not until they were near enough to give the boat a lee and an oil slick did Reed raise his left hand in the signal to haul in gently on board. And then the mate saw what it was all about.

"Easy, there! Easy!" he roared at his gang, who showed signs of following Starkey's idea of ending the job with a flourish.

The lifeboat was on the thin verge of dissolution. Her upper strakes were separating. What the sea that had smashed her in davits had almost done the seas near the tug had about finished. One good husky haul against wind and sea would have opened her out on the surface like a book and spread her into matchwood too light to support clinging men.

"Easy, you lugs!" Mr. Graw growled. "Come in on it like a baby's breath! A couple o' you get lines over as she comes alongside—plenty o' lines, with bowlines tied in 'em!"

The old man had all way off the ship. Mr. Graw stared down at the half sunken boat and the nine men in her. Even with the lee and the oil it wouldn't be an eggshell landing.

Ed Reed had dropped his ax to grab at a boathook. He fended her off the rivet-studded side of the ship. The heavy block dangling at the end of the davit fall swung toward his head. He ducked, grabbed it and hooked on.

"Up!" he yelled to the others. "Up when she rolls down on us! Now!"

The towboat men, an active lot despite their recent privations, went up the lines toward the solid deck like scared rats. Only two needed bowlines looped around them.

The next roll of the *Mary* nearly sank the boat. Reed and Ansorge clung stubbornly to the two davit falls, waiting.

The old man took a short glance at what was left of the lifeboat. She would never stand hoisting.

"Abandon!" he roared down at them. "Come aboard!"

It was time. The *Mary* was rolling her under. Ed Reed turned aft, toward Ansorge.

"Up with you!" he commanded.

At once Ansorge gripped the lines of the davit fall.

"Aye, sir," he answered and swarmed up the tackle.

"AYE, sir!" muttered Mr. Graw, staring down at Ed Reed. "Ansorge called the kid 'sir'!" He knew what that meant. In some swirling, perilous moment in the boat command of her, the responsibility for decisions, had passed from the sweating seaman to the straw-haired stripling.

As Reed followed Ansorge up to the deck the *Mary's* men were clustering around the sodden crew of the tug, offering dry cigarettes.

"Welcome to ye, lads!" cried Starkey, dropping his line. He laid a hand approvingly on Ed Reed's shoulder. "You done that as well, kid, as if I'd been standin' at your ear."

Mr. Graw snorted.

Ed Reed did not reply. But he raised his hand quietly, gripped Starkey's by the wrist and lifted it from his shoulder.

The red-headed skipper of the tug looked up at the old man on the *Mary's* bridge ten feet above him. "By Peter, sir, he did a job o' work," he said, with a nod at Reed. "You pick yer officers young but able."

"Aye," Captain Weston called back. "Young, but he's only my actin' third. The mate's all I have left on his feet an' he'll be needin' relief before we make a landfall."

Reed was as startled as was Mr. Graw. Ansorge was grinning broadly. "Me, acting third, sir? I know you're short-handed but" —Reed glanced at Starkey. "He's really got a ticket, sir," he said with reluctant justice. "I've seen it."

The old wart looked down at his feet.

"Y'know, mister," he said loudly to Mr. Graw," the only Dave Starkey I ever knew who had a third's ticket was a young fellow, bull-chested, with a cauliflower ear."

Mr. Graw thought hard, slapped his leg and sped up the bridge ladder to the old dodo's side.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed in an undertone. "This fellow" —his blunt finger stabbed down at the pallid Starkey— "ain't Starkey at all. He must be a seaman that stole Third Mate Dave Starkey's ticket somewhere. That's why he stowed away on us. He's been makin' a fool o' you—I mean us, sir!"

The old man chuckled.

"D'ye think that he has, Mr. Graw?" He rocked gently, giving himself quick glimpses of his feet. "And what would ye say Starkey's been makin' of young Reed, all unbeknownst to either o' them? Wouldn't ye say a young fellow will finally either get over a couple o' fo'c'sle bosses like Starkey and Ansorge or else go under 'em?"

Mr. Graw shook his head.

"But what if Reed had gone under 'em, sir?" he pointed out indulgently. "He might ha' gotten so discouraged he'd ha' given up even the school ship idea."

The old dodo's glinting eyes under their furry gray brows swept out over the unbeaten, leaping sea.

"Can you or I make a man who goes under fo'c'sle hands stand up on a bridge against that, Mr. Graw?" he demanded with a sweep of his arm toward a white-crested, heaving mountain of a wave. "We could help him against the men, maybe, but what prop would ye use on him to make him face that sea? D'ye think helping him get a paper ticket would do it?"

Mr. Graw backed away. "Hopeless!" he muttered. "The old wart knows lots of questions but he's just too plain dumb to know any answers."

He looked at the sea himself. "What prop—? Huh!" He scrubbed the side of his face with a calloused palm and then, surreptitiously, took a quick look at his own feet. "What prop—does the old wart mean legs?"

"He tried to get me."

HUNTING TROUBLE

By HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

NEAR the lean-to opposite the mine tunnel, Young Hardesty stood looking at a jack-rabbit that was sitting up just beyond the edge of the flat. Slowly Young Hardesty reached for the Winchester on the work bench. He had it to his shoulder when Bedrock came from the tunnel.

"Hey!" shouted the old man. "Don't shoot!"

"What's bitin' you now?" Young Hardesty lowered the rifle reluctantly.

"That gun is plugged," puffed Bedrock. "I was cleaning her yesterday, and I got a wad of rag stuck halfway down the barrel. She'd 'a' blowed your head off."

Young Hardesty scowled. Hell of a note, leaving a gun around that a fellow couldn't use. Bedrock was getting mighty careless in his old age. Young Hardesty set to work, wormed the plug

out and cleaned the rifle. Then he loaded it and laid it back on the bench. He wouldn't have blown his head off because Bedrock had left the rifle unloaded. Had it been loaded . . . Young Hardesty shrugged.

That evening as they sat beside their supper fire Young Hardesty asked Bedrock if he might use the rifle the following day.

"Broke the ejector on my Sharp's," explained Young Hardesty. "I figured to trail over to Red Emery's camp tomorrow mornin'."

"Take her along," said Bedrock. "If you happen to get a deer it won't hurt my feelings none."

Red Emery's camp, over the mountain west of the Mebbyso mine which Bedrock and his young partner had been working for several years, was situated on the southern slope of The Other Valley—a district which Bedrock had prospected years ago. He claimed there was no gold in the valley. Red Emery, a huge simple-minded man with flaming red hair and beard, declared he had found pay dirt there. Young Hardesty was curious. Moreover, Red Emery's wild tales of the early days were interesting. "This one," he was wont to say as he began a particularly horrible account of some desert tragedy, "will curl your hair." In contrast to the high-gesturing, hairy Red Emery, Bedrock was as mild as a summer evening. Young Hardesty liked his meat rare.

Early next morning Young Hardesty set out on Shingles, his pony. He saw no deer as he rode up the slope to the crest above the Mebbyso. Nor did he see any game as he rode down the winding trail to the Valley floor. He stopped at the valley stream, but for some reason his pony would not drink.

Crossing the stream, Young Hardesty rode toward the small, dirty white tent halfway up the southern wall. Within some fifty yards of the camp the pony began to snort and whistle, but Young Hardesty forced him on up the narrow, steep trail. Receiving no response to his halloo, Young Hardesty decided that Red must be out after deer, or in town. But the tent flap was loose. Red always tied it down when leaving camp.

Dismounting, Young Hardesty peered into the tent. Flies buzzed. A chipmunk darted out. Red's blankets lay in a heap on the floor. On the box near the bed was his big silver watch, his pipe and tobacco, the stub of a candle and an old mail-order catalogue. Outside, the fine ashes of a cooking fire eddied in the morning breeze. "Red always packs his watch and his pipe when he goes anywhere," reflected Young Hardesty. "But his hat and his rifle ain't present, so I reckon he ain't."

Young Hardesty wandered about the vicinity, occasionally hallooing. He disliked to return to the Mebbyso after having just left. He had decided to ride down to Grant, at the southern end of the valley, and have a chat with the storekeeper, when his uneasy gaze came to rest on an empty cartridge. He picked it up, smelled of it. There was still a faint tang of burnt powder about it. It hadn't been fired a great while ago. It was a forty-five-seventy.

Red's rifle was of that caliber. Perhaps Red had spotted a deer down the slope and saw a chance to make an easy kill. About to toss the empty shell away, Young Hardesty hesitated. Red Emery always saved his empties and re-loaded them. Kind of a stingy idea, considering that Red didn't use the rifle often, and then only to get game. But then, Red had other queer ideas. He always saved pieces of string and nails, and re-soled his own boots, tacking on iron heel plates to save them. Yet when it came to grub he would feed a fellow till he couldn't wiggle. No, Red wasn't stingy, just queer.

The sun, well up now, began to bite into Young Hardesty's back. He decided to hunt a little shade, have a

smoke and return to the Mebbyso. But first he would water Shingles at the spring back of Red's camp.

Shingles, who had refused to drink when they were crossing the valley stream, held back on the reins as Young Hardesty led him toward the spring.

"Now what the hell!" blurted Young Hardesty. "Ain't you got any sense?"

Shingles still acted nervous and fidgety. Young Hardesty himself began to feel a bit queer. What ailed the pony? There weren't any snakes around, or bear or bobcat. The close, brush-hidden trail to the spring hid them both for a moment. Then Shingles came out on the run, reins dragging. On the flat in front of the tent he whirled and stopped, head up and nostrils wide.

In the brush a few yards west of the spring Young Hardesty was kneeling near a pile of broken rock. Piece by piece he threw it aside. He uncovered a huge foot in a grimy blue sock, then the legs in faded overalls. Red Emery had been shot through the back of the head at close range.

"HE didn't do that himself," muttered Young Hardesty. "And I didn't see tracks anywhere."

Bedrock used to say that a man who looked for trouble always found it. Trouble? Tracks? In this case they pretty near meant the same thing. Young Hardesty caught up his pony and tied him. Then he set out on foot to circle the hillside.

Up the slope west of the camp he came upon wide tracks of someone who had worn boots with iron plates on the heels. Red's tracks, of course. And fresh, not over three hours old. Young Hardesty followed them to the crest. From slope to slope he surveyed the great sweep of brush and rock. He inspected the ground at his feet. Alongside the boot tracks were the tracks of a shod horse, and although the sun had hit the open ground on the crest, the edges of the tracks had not yet crumbled. Red Emery never rode a horse. Always he went on foot. Yet here the boot tracks vanished. Only the tracks of the horse remained.

Young Hardesty made his way back down the slope, paused to tie the tent flap, glanced about; mounting, he followed the tracks up to the crest and down to the valley floor.

"This one will curl your hair!" He imagined he could hear Red Emery's voice as he began one of his wild yarns. Young Hardesty's scalp felt tight.

He rode with a cautious eye on the surrounding country. The tracks followed no trail, simply wound in and out among the rock and brush. The horse that made them had been going steadily, unhurriedly. After an hour had passed and the tracks continued southward, Young Hardesty believed the horseman had headed for the border. Neither equipped nor especially anxious to trail the unknown rider clear to Mexico, Young Hardesty decided to swing over to the town of Grant and report the murder.

Finally he came to the old trail that led from Grant to the Henty ranch, little used now since the Henty boys had been killed. The trail crossed the course he had been following. Young Hardesty dismounted, examined the ground closely. The unknown horseman had swung into the old trail and had headed for Grant.

Far from a railroad or settlement, Grant knew few visitors. A ramshackle store on which was tacked the sign "Post office," an adobe blacksmith shop, the storekeeper's home across from it, a Mexican saloon and a few scattered houses made it not much more than a landmark. A stranger passing through would be noted and talked about.

There was no peace officer in Grant, but there was a telephone from which a fellow could notify the sheriff's office.

Still keeping a vigilant eye ahead, Young Hardesty swung on down the

trail. He knew he was hunting trouble in tracking the murderer of Red Emery. Yet he had to admit to himself that he liked it. He was sixteen, tough and ready. And life at the Mebbyso mine was pretty monotonous with its round of drilling, shooting rock, shoveling and wheelbarrowing. The coming of Red Emery had livened things up a bit. But now Red was gone.

Young Hardesty shrugged. It was the sheriff's job to get the murderer. Yet Young Hardesty felt that it was his job to at least find out who the man was and where he was going. Trouble was, you couldn't shoot a fellow down just because you suspected he had killed a man. You had to have evidence. But when you were right close behind someone who had ridden away from a camp where another man had been murdered, and you happened to come up with that someone, it was natural to be ready for almost anything.

AT the hitch rail in front of the saloon stood a wornout pony. Familiar with every brand in the district, Young Hardesty couldn't place the horse. He rode on back to the saloon and stepped in.

At the bar lounged a tall, heavy-set man in the customary blue jeans and cotton shirt of a cowhand. But instead of the usual high-heeled boots, this cowhand was wearing broad-soled miners' shoes. He turned his head as Young Hardesty entered, nodded and asked him to have a drink. Promptly Young Hardesty accepted.

The stranger's hair was clipped short. His wide, coarse face was heavily overgrown with a stubble of black beard. He laughed as he talked, seemed to be just a bit too free and easy to be natural. "I just lit in. Was just goin' to take one myself," he said, nodding to the Mexican proprietor.

Young Hardesty didn't want a drink, but he blinked his down, and began to curl a cigarette. The stranger, who said his name was Hyde, fumbled in his overalls and drew out a small roll of bills tied with a piece of dirty string.

Young Hardesty felt a queer chill shoot up his spine. The only man he had ever seen who rolled bills and tied them with string was Red Emery. And never before had Young Hardesty seen a cowhand wearing miners' shoes.

Young Hardesty bought a drink for the stranger, declining to take another himself.

"Live around here?" said Hyde.

"Over the hill, at the Mebbyso. Interested in minin'?"

"Not me!" laughed Hyde. "Ain't nothin' in it. Mebby," he continued, his deep set eyes on Young Hardesty's expressionless face, "I could make a trade with you."

"Mebby you could."

"Horses, I mean. I got a long ride ahead and my cayuse is plumb wore down. Now that pony of yours—"

"He's good enough for me," said Young Hardesty.

"You mean you won't trade—and mebby I give you some cash to boot?"

"Not this evenin'."

Hyde laughed. "Headin' back to your camp tonight?"

Young Hardesty thought fast. "No. I'm headin' for Chuckawalla. Got to meet a friend. I just stopped by to pick up some grub. We're kind of short up at the mine."

"Now that sounds good to me. I'm headin' out Chuckawalla way myself. Mebby I could side you a spell."

"Guess you could." Young Hardesty had mentioned Chuckawalla haphazardly. Until the stranger also mentioned the town, Young Hardesty had no intention of riding in that direction. He had made a good guess. A desert town in the rough land toward the east, Chuckawalla was in little traveled country, flat waterless land all about, and

approached by an old Apache trail across the isolated Iron Range.

"When do you aim to pull out?" asked the stranger.

"Right soon. I'll go dig up some grub."

Lean and weary in the afternoon sun stood Hyde's pony, a ribby sorrel with light mane and tail. From the saddle-horn hung a heavy rifle. The rig was brush-scarred and worn. Behind the cantle was tied a fairly big roll. Young Hardesty stepped into the general store and bought a small supply of provisions.

Surmising that Hyde would follow him in and buy some grub for himself, Young Hardesty knew he would not have time to get connected by telephone with the sheriff's office. Bowdry was thirty miles north, and telephone service was slow, at best. Besides, Brown, the proprietor, might ask questions and bungle things.

Borrowing pencil and a scrap of paper, Young Hardesty wrote rapidly: "Red Emery is murdered. I figure that a fella named Hyde done it. I am riding with him to Chuckawalla. Get the sheriff on the trail pronto." He passed the note to Brown just as Hyde stepped into the store.

Hyde pulled the small roll of bills from his pocket, untied it and paid for what few provisions he would need on the journey. The storekeeper had read Young Hardesty's note. As long as Young Hardesty and the stranger were in the store, he didn't make a move toward the telephone. Nor did he show in any way that he had just received some disturbing news. Past experience had taught him that Young Hardesty usually knew what he was doing. The kid was taking a long chance, reflected the storekeeper. But Young Hardesty was like that—and usually he made good.

When Young Hardesty and the stranger left town, Brown got the sheriff's office and made his report. The sheriff himself was not then in Bowdry but one of his deputies, who knew Young Hardesty, said that the office would get busy right away.

IN the long, slanting shadows of late afternoon Young Hardesty and Hyde rode across the flats east of Grant.

The pace was slow. Young Hardesty had plenty of time to size up his companion. Hyde was a heavy man, almost as big as Red Emery. Now he was acting natural enough, talking about the country, distances and the possibility of getting water.

While the other talked, Young Hardesty found it difficult to keep his gaze from Hyde's hat, a faded black sombrero which looked mighty like the hat Red Emery used to wear. Young Hardesty hoped to get a close look at it. He couldn't actually identify it as Red's unless he examined the sweat band. At the back of his sombrero, between the sweat band and the felt, Red had tucked a folded slip of newspaper. Anyone might do that. But this particular slip of newspaper contained an account of one of Red's strikes in the early days. Once the miner had taken the slip out of his hat so that Young Hardesty might read it.

Even as he rode alongside the man he suspected of murdering Red, Young Hardesty was reasoning that Red might have been queer in little ways but he usually knew what he was doing. That slip of paper, for instance. If he had tucked it in the front of his sombrero, the sweat of his forehead would soon have blurred the print and rotted the paper. But Red had tucked the slip at the back where the sweat wouldn't reach it.

"Funny," said Hyde, "how we come to get acquainted."

"That's what I was thinkin'. But in this here country a fella's like to run into most anything."

"Takes me for a kid," thought Young Hardesty grimly. "Now I wonder if he's

got any idea what I'm takin' him for?"

In an hour they had crossed the flats and were beginning to enter the rough country, the foothills of the Iron Range. Here the trail was bulwarked with huge slabs of rock, dark red and glittering. The brush had thinned. Clumps of cactus and sprawling ocotillo thrust up from crevices in the rock.

Hyde's pony lagged. Occasionally Hyde glanced at Young Hardesty's mount, but he said nothing further about a trade. Meanwhile Young Hardesty made it his job to be pleasant. It was hard work. Now that they were out on the desert, alone, he yearned to have it out with this man, talk him into giving himself away, making some slip that would condemn him. But it wouldn't do to force things. Sooner or later Hyde would do or say something that would lead to a showdown.

Meanwhile Young Hardesty was wondering if the storekeeper had got the message through to the sheriff's office. Would the sheriff set out immediately for Chuckawalla, or ride down to Grant and take up the trail from there? Sheriff Halloway would save a lot of time if he decided to ride straight from Bowdry to Chuckawalla. If he did so, he would strike into the Apache trail midway between the two towns. Young Hardesty estimated that Hyde and himself would be well up into the Iron range foothills before sundown. He wondered if Hyde would ride all night on that played out horse, or make camp. Young Hardesty decided that in either case he would stay with Hyde, watch his every move. To let the suspected man get away now would be mighty poor business.

For a long while they rode in silence, Hyde with his shoulders humped, his head down, letting the sorrel take its time. Far up in the foothills the leg-weary sorrel stopped of its own accord. Young Hardesty drew up, gestured down the southern slope. "There's water in the bottom, yonder. Not much. But enough to hold us till tomorrow mornin'."

His gaze on Young Hardesty's pony, Hyde nodded. "Might as well make camp here. This cayuse is about all in." He didn't act like a man fearful of pursuit. Yet Young Hardesty was not surprised. Hyde had been mighty easy going all along, probably beceuse he felt that no one knew he had murdered Red Emery, and wouldn't know the prospector had been killed for some time to come. The prospector's camp was in a wild and isolated region. It might be weeks before anybody happened to visit the camp. Yes, Hyde would reason it out that way. Meanwhile he was leaving the country. Otherwise he would hardly head for Chuckawalla and the border. Worrying as to what was best to do, Young Hardesty dismounted and led his pony down to the spring.

Dusk settled over the hillside camp. Beyond the fading embers of the fire Hyde lay stretched out, his head on his saddle. Beside him lay his Winchester. His back against his own saddle, Young Hardesty sat smoking a cigarette. Heat still radiated from the rocks. Above the eastern pinnacles hung a slender moon. It was the rainy season, yet the sky was clear, the stars big and brilliant.

If Young Hardesty had been forced to ride all night, or do anything to keep going, he could have managed it without any especial fatigue. But to sit with his back against a saddle hour after hour, staring into the shadows, suspicious of the person he was camping with, was the hardest kind of work.

When daylight filtered slowly across the eastern pinnacles, when the wiry ocotillo became itself and not a tangle of wavering snakes in the air, and the features of the man across from the little heap of ashes were again discernible, Young Hardesty heaved a sigh of relief. Now he could at least see what was going on.

Just what kind of a game would Hyde play? The thought teased Young Hard-

esty's imagination. As he sat gazing at Hyde, who was still asleep, Young Hardesty concluded that his safest bet was to hold him up and make him march back to Grant. The sorrel pony was about done.

EVEN as Young Hardesty made this decision, Hyde's eyes unclosed. He picked up his Winchester, stood up and shook himself.

"Looks like another day," he said heartily. "I'd kind of like to get acrost the range before she gets too hot." He stood his rifle against a rock and went down to the spring. "Rustle some wood," he called back. "I'll get enough water for the coffee."

Young Hardesty was puzzled. Hyde had left his rifle behind. That didn't look as if he feared any treachery. Unwilling to go ahead with his plan until he had more evidence, Young Hardesty hesitated. He felt that he was a fool not to take the other man's rifle, stick him up and take him back to Grant. But suppose Hyde hadn't murdered Red Emery —that through some peculiar combination of circumstances he had come into possession of Red's hat and shoes and gun? Hyde hadn't been in any special hurry when in Grant, and he seemed to be taking it cool and easy now, not acting like a man that was making a getaway.

Hyde fetched water. While the coffee boiled he took the roll from his saddle and went back down to the spring. He returned, now wearing high-heeled boots. He tied the bundle onto the saddle again and came over to the breakfast fire.

"Figured mebby I could make a trade with you," he said casually.

"Trade for what?"

"Horses. Give you my cayuse and fifty dollars to boot."

"And set me afoot? Not this journey."

Hyde laughed. "The sorrel can make it to Chuckawalla."

"If he can make it to Chuckawalla, what's the matter with you buyin' a fresh horse when you get there?"

"Nothin'. Only I kind of like the looks of your pony."

"So do I." Young Hardesty poured coffee. They sipped the hot brew and munched crackers. When they had finished their scanty meal Hyde picked up his saddle. "Ain't changed your mind?"

"No."

As Hyde swung the saddle to the sorrel's back the bundle broke loose and fell. On the ground lay two cans of tomatoes, a package of crackers, a small can of coffee, a creased and faded coat and a pair of miners' shoes.

Young Hardesty stared. Hyde gathered up the things and began to repack.

"Funny about them shoes." Hyde was taking up the slack in the cinch. "Found 'em back yonder in a camp. There was an old tent and some tools and a little grub, but nobody was to home."

Young Hardesty again felt a queer chill run up his spine. "You mean you found 'em in the valley over beyond Grant?"

"Yes. At a little old camp on the west side of the valley."

Hyde picked up the shoes and tossed them far down the hillside.

Young Hardesty's suspicion increased.

"Don't want anybody to find 'em," he thought. "But he wanted me to have 'em." He said, "Somebody could have used those shoes. A Mexican, mebby."

For an instant Hyde's eyelids flickered. He seemed about to speak, but apparently changed his mind.

Meanwhile Young Hardesty had saddled up. Gaunt-flanked, his head low, Hyde's pony stood drowsing in the sunshine. Hyde walked to the pony, took up the reins and kicked him in the belly.

Mounting the sorrel, he gestured ahead. Young Hardesty didn't like the idea of turning his back on him.

"Go ahead," he told Hyde. "I forgot to fill my canteen."

"I'll wait," said Hyde negligently.

To ride to the spring Young Hardesty had to turn his back on the other. He hesitated. Hyde, his Winchester across his legs, sat looking at him.

Hyde had a slow horse, and yet he would wait for his companion. That didn't seem regular. It looked as if things were heading toward a showdown.

Young Hardesty was certain that Hyde wanted the pony, would get him if he could. Surmising that once astride Shingles, Hyde would light out and leave his companion to dog along with the wornout sorrel, Young Hardesty came to a quick and reckless decision. He would agree to trade with Hyde, pretending that what he really wanted was the forty-five Winchester, Red Emery's gun. Naturally Hyde wouldn't give up the rifle. But if Young Hardesty offered his own Winchester in exchange, they might come to an agreement.

"Yesterday you was talkin' about tradin' horses," said Young Hardesty. "Now that sorrel of yours ain't much account, but mebby if I can get enough to boot we can make a deal."

"Trade you even," said Hyde.

"No. But if you'll throw in that rifle you're packin'—"

Hyde laughed. "Like hell I will."

"What I mean, I'll trade you horses even, and guns even. This here Winchester is just as handy as the one you got." Young Hardesty paused deliberately. "I always wanted to own one of them forty-five Winchesters.

"All right," said Hyde. "Go ahead and fill your canteen."

Young Hardesty was not afraid to turn his back now. Hyde was getting what he wanted. He was also getting rid of Red Emery's rifle. Already he had thrown away the shoes.

DOWN at the spring Young Hardesty didn't take time to fill the canteen. Instead he ripped a strip from his bandanna, rolled it into a wad, moistened it and with the aid of a greasewood branch, rammed the wet wad down the muzzle of his Winchester as far as he could.

He came back to the trail carrying canteen and rifle.

"'Course," said Young Hardesty, "I'm figurin' on that fifty dollars, likewise."

"That'll be all right." Hyde stepped down and began to unloose the cinch. Things were shaping up just right. He wouldn't have to kill the kid to get the horse. And sooner or later the kid would be found with the dead man's rifle and a stolen horse.

They made the exchange. When he had his own saddle cinched on Young Hardesty's pony, Hyde took off his hat. "What do you say to swappin'? I'm gettin' kind of tired of wearin' this old black lid. I kind of fancy a gray this mornin'."

"Hell, that hat's too big for me!"

"And the fifty," said Hyde, making as if to dig up the money.

Young Hardesty parted with his own Stetson with apparent reluctance.

"Got to put some waddin' in this here sunbonnet," he declared running his finger between the sweat band and the felt of the hat Hyde had been wearing. The slip of newspaper was there. He knew now for certain that it was Red Emery's hat.

"How about that money?" said Young Hardesty.

"Money, hell! You got all that is comin' to you."

"You ain't!" said Young Hardesty quickly. He didn't seem to be paying any special attention to Hyde now, but was gazing down from the ridge trail out across the northern flats below.

"Three of 'em," he said, as if to himself. "Mebby that would be John Halloway and a couple of deputies. Mebby they're lookin' for the man that murdered Red Emery."

Hyde's eyelids flickered. He was

standing with his back toward the north. He wanted to look around, but Young Hardesty's eyes were burning into his. Young Hardesty held his rifle at his hip, the muzzle centered on Hyde's stomach.

"You thought you killed Red Emery," he said, his voice sounding strangely far away. "You didn't. You thought you buried him under a pile of rock near the spring. You didn't do that, neither." Trancelike, Young Hardesty went on. "Thought you was wearin' his hat and shoes and packin' his old forty-five-seventy. You ain't." Young Hardesty's voice pitched higher. "It was me killed Red Emery—shot him in the back of his head with his own rifle. Down yonder is the posse. Brown, over in Grant, telephoned for 'em when we was leavin' town yesterday. All you got to do is to turn me over to 'em."

"You damned little rat!" Hyde's rifle jumped to his shoulder. Paying no heed to the voice or the rifle leveled at his own chest, he pulled the trigger. Young Hardesty's face went white. A muffled explosion blew the breech block from the plugged rifle. Hyde staggered back, his hands to his face. He sank down, quivered and was still.

"I didn't have to kill him," Young Hardesty was muttering. "He tried to get me." Young Hardesty's hands were shaking. He tried to pull himself together. "Killed himself. But it was me plugged that rifle."

SHINGLES had shied away, and was now standing quietly, a few yards down the trail. The sorrel hadn't moved. Young Hardesty climbed to a high rock, fired into the air. He waved his hat. Far below the posse swerved and headed straight for the range.

When Halloway and his men finally reached the crest of the ridge, they found Young Hardesty seated in the shade of a boulder, beside him an old black Stetson, two rifles and a pair of heavy-soled shoes. Nearby stood the two horses. In the trail lay the body of a man, a creased and faded coat over its face. Halloway whipped the coat away. The deputies crowded nearer.

"That's him," said one of them. "Broke out of the pen a week ago. Killed a hand over on the Tonto and took his overalls and boots. Stole that sorrel, yonder, from the T-Y outfit." The deputy turned to Young Hardesty. "Just what happened, Joe?"

"Breech block blew out of Bedrock's Winchester, mostly."

"Bedrock's rifle?"

"The same. This fella and I traded horses and rifles and hats. My ole lid is kind of tore up."

"Come out of it, Joe!" Sheriff Halloway was speaking. "Brown telephoned from Grant that somebody murdered Red Emery. Is this the man?"

"Here's Red's hat and his shoes and his gun. This fella had 'em. Said his name is Hyde. I trailed him from Red's camp, yesterday. You fellas better go over and have a look. You'll find Red near the spring."

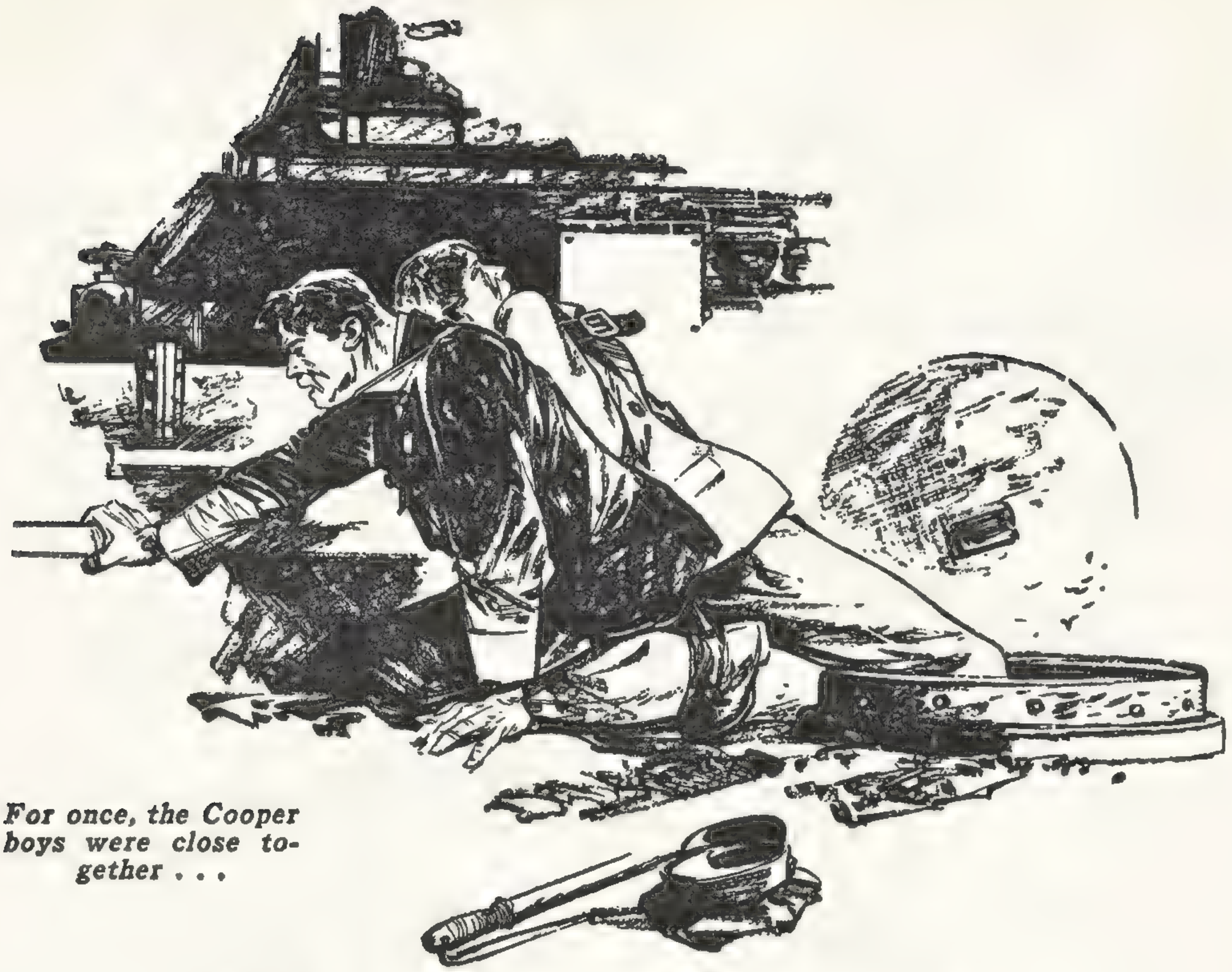
Young Hardesty seemed in a daze as he mounted and followed them as they rode toward Grant. Behind the cavalcade straggled the sorrel pony, following his kind.

Finally Halloway dropped back and rode alongside Young Hardesty. They were nearing Grant.

"Looks like you did a good job, Joe," said the sheriff.

"Mebby," said Young Hardesty. "But Bedrock is goin' to raise hell about that busted Winchester."

But that wasn't what was deepest in Young Hardesty's mind. He was trying to square accounts with himself. If Hyde hadn't tried to kill him, Hyde wouldn't have blown the top of his own head off with the plugged rifle. Bedrock was right. When you hunted trouble you always found it.



For once, the Cooper boys were close together . . .

HARNESS BULL

A Novelette

By ANDREW A. CAFFREY

MIKE COOPER, having fully satisfied the inner man, pushed the kitchen table into his brother John's lap and loomed ceilingward. Brother John, reading the morning paper, said nothing, nor did he make any move. With the table's edge still prodding him at midriff, he lit another cigarette and went right along with his reading.

Mother Cooper was clearing the table. Mike Cooper placed a mighty index finger under either armpit and carried Mrs. Cooper, dishes and all, into the kitchen. He said, "If the pan was ready, ma, I'd dump the whole mess of you into the water."

"And you're the one who could do it," Mother Cooper said. "It's powerful you are, Mikie, like the father before you."

"Powerful like a horse," said John Cooper, without looking up. "Y' know, you don't see many horses these days, 'less you go over across the tracks, on Mike's beat. Strong things, horses."

Officer Mike Cooper was just about due on that across-the-tracks beat of his. So, displaying no outward annoyance at being compared to the other noble wearer of harness, he went ahead with what Mother Cooper called "the morning primping." He hit the big dogs a few snappy raps with the shine-rag. Satisfied, he eyed the high gloss.

John mused: "Break a bottle over them and we have a few more dry docks for the Navy."

Officer Mike whisked the neat blue trousers, then reached for his blouse and shouldered his way into that snug garment. He ran the polish-rag over each button as he sealed himself within. Then, with a big man's love of neck room, he craned and stretched, making sure that the clean, white collar was at least a few sizes too large. Mike could always beat inspection by resorting to the old army trick: pull in the chin and bulge the throat, thus filling any too-large collar.

"It's a fine-looking uniform, Mikie." Mother Cooper said.

"And it'd look a devil of a lot better," said brother John, "if he'd slip a sweat-pad under that collar. Say, how do you flatties keep the dames from following you?"

"Dames follow us!" said Mike. "Gosh, feller, what chance have we F-men with you bring-'em-in-dead G-Men around?"

Agent John Cooper, Federal Bureau of Investigation, now noting that Mike was putting the rag to his heavy belt and buckles, said, "Right you be. Say, if we wore harness like that we wouldn't be able to fight 'em off. Look, this plug in the comic strip has a belly-band just like yours."

"Never mind what you learn in the funnies," Mike Cooper grinned. "But speakin' of horses, how come you over-advertised Feds haven't done anythin' about "Hoss" Hass and his mob? When are you goin' to bring 'em in? The papers're always tellin' us that the G-men are hot on Hoss's trail."

"Read the papers!" Agent John Cooper recommended. "If ya could read small print, my fine man, you'd know that we have Hoss Hass and three of his sub-brains under federal indictment, awaiting trial and that we're working in on half a dozen of his smaller fry through two-three different angles."

"Yeah," Officer Mike agreed, "I've heard all about that. That's why we city cops have even been tipped off to go slow on Hoss, so's not to give him and his thugs any minor-offense dodges on our city courts' calendars. Meantime, Hoss and his mob do two minor murders in the last month, while you high-powered gents try to catch them puttin' a lead slug in a slot-machine proven to be the sacred property of an inter-state vendin' company. The bettin' is we city boys'll have to pull Hoss for parkin' in front of a fire-plug yet."

"You've got something there," Agent John Cooper said absently. Once more he was deep in his morning paper. "Yes, sir, horses are great strong fellers. But you'll never get any place being a horse."

THE home phone ringing will silence any copper or agent. When they want you, they phone. And somebody is always wanting you, if you're a city cop or a federal agent. So both big Coopers sat up straight while Mother Cooper answered the phone's ring.

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Shane," Mother Cooper was saying. "Laurence? Yes, I'll tell him. Right away, yes—and thanks for giving him the work. Good-by, Mr. Shane."

"That was—"

"—Mr. Broom Shane," supplied Agent John, slipping Mike the wink, "an' would ye please be callin' ye youngest, laziest son outa bed, Mrs. Cooper, 'an astin' him to repoort down at Hall o' Justice fer a few days work?"

"Oh, you hush up, John," Mother Cooper said. "Laurence isn't lazy. He's only young and growing."

"He's been just that for one devil of a long time, ma," said Agent John Jack. "I'll never forget the job I had trying to talk old Brown into letting our Larry quit his first year in high-school, for just an hour or less, so's he could go down and vote the ticket. That was the year our Larry came of age. Remember?"

"I don't remember any such thing," Mother Cooper said. She was passing through the parlor, on her way to call Laurence, the third, last and youngest of the Cooper boys. "Laurence's as bright as any of you."

Under his breath, Mike Cooper, reaching for his cap, said, "*Brighter* than any of us. I'd say. Larry won't work—much."

"They'll never get harness on him," John said. "Then, again, perhaps they will," he concluded, thoughtfully.

Heavy-eyed, less than half awake, the youngest Cooper came stumbling after his mother into the kitchen. Larry was roping up a real swell-looking robe as he came. Officer Mike, just going out, turned, took Larry's right arm, and with great solicitation led him to the table. Agent John slid a chair under Larry, also with great, brotherly solicitation.

Then Mike pressed Larry floorward. John snapped the chair out from under Larry. Mike, in the same split second, pushed the table across the slick linoleum. And by the time Larry started throwing things, Officer Mike Cooper was through the door and down a half flight of stairs, while Agent John Jack was through the parlor and into his mother's room. Mother Cooper then went to work trying to convince Larry that his brothers were only fooling.

"It's a way they have," she said.

"Yeah! They're like all coppers: the way they have is always rough on the other guy. The lousy bulls!"

"Hush, Larry! It's an honorable calling," his mother said. "There's good police officers and there's bad."

"Nuts," Larry said.

OFFICER Mike Cooper's across-the-tracks beat really wasn't on the nether side of the railroad, but it was a district that had known its heyday and passed. Blocks of ancient brownstones, once the top of the town, showed Rooms-for-Rent signs in profusion, and you could sell bananas in the street.

The west limits of Mike's slow stroll brings him along the Avenue. And on the Avenue, facing Civic Center, is Mike's single building of any importance, the old Hall of Justice, the building wherein Mr. "Broom" Shane is superintendent. The Hall of Justice, sort of left high and dry by the city's planning board, still does business aplenty in its drab isolation. It's gingerbread pile of rusty, brown sandstone houses courts that range all the way from small claims to superior; all of which brings humanity's strange melange through the Avenue portals in endless daily parade.

Each day, for just a half hour, Mike Cooper relieves the regular officer on Hall of Justice duty. And while that worthy goes to lunch, Mike gets busy out on the wide sidewalk. Politicians think they can park in the red zone. But they can't; not while Mike Cooper is on duty. The city's biggest crooks, with business in the courts, have an idea that they can overstay the twenty-minute limit on the curb spaces, and said leading crooks are all wrong, too. It's a busy half hour that Mike Cooper puts in, and it starts at exactly one o'clock.

There was a hybrid taxi of no known company parked in the first space on the curb when Mike Cooper arrived and told Officer Bill Wilson to go get it.

Wilson hooked a thumb in the general direction of the taxi just mentioned and said, "That mug's twenty minutes is just about up, Mike. Better shag him. I don't like his looks."

Mike Cooper first took care of three other taxi pilots who were trying to land their machines on the red zone all at one time. Then he sidled up to the driver of the gorilla taxi and asked that gentleman whether or not he had taken a good look at the posted sign that

said: *20-Minute Parking—Between 9* A.M. *and 5* P.M.

"Yeah, an' so what?" snarled the taxi's driver.

"Oh, a rough gentleman, eh?" said Mike Cooper. "So this, you lug—start rollin'!"

"I got seven minutes still standin' on me watch, copper," said the tough gentleman. "An' I stand 'em down, see?"

Officer Mike Cooper took pencil in hand. He wrote it out.

"Can you write?" he asked the taximan. "Then sign it here."

"Can I write! Say! I'll put me X on these slips all day for you, then tear 'em up jus' as fast." And, so saying, the mug did exactly as promised. He signed on the dotted line, then tore the slip in two direction and blew the ragged bits in Officer Mike's face. It's hard to tell whether or not Mike Cooper would have just stood there to take it, had not something else happened. An oversized black sedan had slid into the passenger-unloading zone and eased to a stop with its front bumper nudging the rear bumper of the taxi.

"Hey, buddy! You goin' out?" the dark driver of the newly arrived car was asking.

Officer Mike Cooper looked back. This was Hoss Hass' well known black sedan.

"Goin' right out," the tough tearer-of-slips made answer. "Stand clear, copper, or I'll take a leg offa ya!"

And the tough guy, who still had all of five or six minutes standing on his watch, according to his say-so, stepped on his car's starter, cut out of the curb-lock and was gone.

THE Hass driver slid into the space, and Hoss Hass unloaded from his car—that car whose sleek black sides, so the wise ones said, were made of armor plate. Three other elaborately-dressed henchmen stepped to the sidewalk with their big-shot master. All five were mouthing costly after-lunch cigars.

Hoss Hass stopped just long enough to blow a cloud of the expensive smoke toward Officer Mike Cooper and say, "Well, if it isn't my fine friend Mike Cooper. Have a cigar, Michael? No? . . . Well, well, what a copper! But just a second, Officer Michael Cooper—would you be giving me the correct time by your wrist watch? I want to be sure that you don't short-change me on parking time. . . . Ah! ah!—I know that Officer Michael Cooper would like to hang a tag on Mr. Hass' fine car. Seven minutes past one is what your watch says, eh, officer?"—and Hoss Hass, with a bug-eyed sidewalk crowd watching, looked closely at Mike Cooper's timepiece. "Thank you, Michael. And now would you be keeping an eye on my fine car, while the boys and I run into the Hall of Justice on a bit of business? We won't be long. And see to it that we don't over-park the twenty minutes."

"If you do. Mr. Hass," Officer Michael Cooper said, "you'll draw a ticket. Now, get t'hell goin' and clear this sidewalk!"

Mike Cooper, red around that collar which had become too tight, took a few steps toward the Hall's great portals with Hass. His four cigar-puffing worthies had hesitated on the lower steps, glaring.

"And you birds," barked Mike at the four, "keep them steps clear! D'ya hear—"

Nobody, perhaps, really heard Mike Cooper just then. And, of a sudden, he had even forgotten them and swung back toward the curb. The avenue was filled with the steady ring of all crossing gongs. For blocks in each direction those fire-department signals had brought all traffic to a standstill, and the eight officers on crossing duty, a stone's throw from Mike Cooper's post, had lined up,

four on either side of the avenue, with their broad backs set against all cross-town movement. Officer Mike Cooper stepped out on the pavement. Then the ears of the watching world were filled with the hellish wail, roar and hammer of thundering equipment. That big red-and-gold parade—a big city's fire department—was going by.

All downtown equipment was rolling on that first alarm, and it rolled for nine minutes without let-up, with the curb-lining thousands awed to keen silence. Then the corner gongs quit clanging, eight crossing officers did just what the green lights said they must do at the exact time, and traffic was moving north and south on the avenue again.

But the roar of the cavalcade had hardly died away in the south when a new, oncoming, conglomeration of ear-splitting wails filled the immediate vicinity of Officer Cooper's post. Again the eight crossing officers stopped traffic in both directions. Once more Officer Mike Cooper stepped to the pavement. This time it was a rush of police radio and riot cars sirening their way into the civic center, into the city's banking district. And insofar as they were, no doubt, coming in on a calling-all-cars broadcast, those cars came aplenty; so all of four or five minutes passed before avenue and cross-town traffic moved again. By then, after a tie-up of some fifteen minutes, surface travel was in a mess.

Officer Mike Cooper had slowly back-stepped to the curb.

"I always says its the cross-roads o' the wurld, this traffuk pint here, Michael," Mr. Broom Shane was saying at Mike's elbow.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Shane," Officer Mike said. "Yeah, things seem to be happenin' today. Say, I haven't seen my brother Larry around this noon. Did he show up?"

"Shure, he did not," said Mr. Shane. "An' I be havin' two-thray days wuurk fer Laurence, too, Michael. I called ye good mather, meself, this mawnin', so I did."

"I know you did. I was there when the phone call came. And you say Larry didn't show up? That's funny." Officer Mike Cooper was a bit bothered, and his face showed it.

"But never ye be mindin', Michael," Mr. Shane added. "I'll hold the wuurk fer Laurence. An' betwix us, Michael, the boy ain't fer bein' wuurth a tinker's damn at ennythin' I put him. But fer ye good mather I'll allus give him the wuurk. An' how is Mrs. Cooper's state o' health?"

Officer Mike Cooper's attention was drawn from Mr. Shane. Hoss Hass and six of his easily-recognized henchmen were hurrying down the steps toward their waiting car. Six henchmen. Two more than when he went in.

MIKE COOPER sort of wondered where the big shot kept all those extra thugs, so close on call. So Officer Mike Cooper glanced at his watch. It showed exactly 1:30; which meant that the Hass car had been parked three minutes overtime.

Mike Cooper couldn't be petty, and it's more than likely he'd have said nothing, were it not for the fact that Hoss Hass also checked his own time, then went to bull-baiting the copper.

"It's three minutes of your time that we've stolen, Officer Michael Cooper," Hass stopped on the curb to say—with the sidewalk crowd already stalling to listen and watch. "Is it that Officer Michael Cooper don't be having the education to write out traffic tickets?"

"Clear this sidewalk, Hass!" Officer Cooper snapped. With a few quick strides he was abeam the Hass car. He had jerked open the front, curb-side

door. He had clamped Hoss Hass' left arm in the vise-like grip of his big right mitt. And he had twisted, tumbled, the mighty one asprawl the front seat. Six mugs within that car started reaching for things. "One bad move, you cowboys, and I'll slug your teeth out!" Officer Mike Cooper promised, and seven finely-dressed gentlemen, for some reason or other, took him at his word.

"Move on!" Officer Mike Cooper said to his sidewalk crowd. Then, to Hass—"And now I'll write out that ticket."

"You're too good to me, Officer Michael Cooper," Hoss Hass said, and laughed. His mob laughed with him. But Mike Cooper wrote it out. He was madder than hell. Somehow or other, he had a hunch that the laugh was on him.

One-thirty had passed. Officer Bill Wilson wasn't back, and Wilson was a very prompt man. Five minutes more passed, then it stretched into ten. At 1:45, Officer Mike Cooper had to ring his box, on the far side of the Hall of Justice, and he was swearing worriedly. With two minutes to go, he saw Wilson hurrying across the avenue. So Mike Cooper, in a hurry to get going, walked off post and met Officer Wilson on the corner.

"Take it over, Bill. I'm late on my ring," Officer Mike Cooper said, then asked: "What's all the noise over in the Center?"

"That's what held me, Mike," Wilson said. "A mob just knocked over the First National. They walked out with the Public Works' payroll, all cash, plus just about all the loose jack in the cages."

"Any idea who it was?" Mike Cooper asked.

"I didn't get any particulars," Wilson said. "As soon as we cleared the sidewalk and got traffic moving, I hoofed it for here. They say the mob came in by way of City Hall alley, put everybody in the First National on the floor, then worked fast. As I get it, there were eight in the mob. See you later, Mike."

Just then the green lights clicked and cross-town traffic poured across the avenue, into and from Civic Center; and with the pedestrian surge coming from the Center was none other than tall, slick Larry Cooper. Mike spotted him just as he was turning to leave Wilson. Larry, obviously seeing his brother, did a bit of jay-walking, cut the corner, and hurried through the waiting portals of Mr. Broom Shane's towering stronghold. And just as Officer Mike Cooper started striding, he heard Bill Wilson repeating, for one of those two crossing cops—"Yeh, they say there were eight in the mob."

By two o'clock Officer Mike Cooper had made his required box report. At 2:15 he was at the far, east end of his beat, the northwest corner of Commercial and Fifth. He stalled on that corner to talk a bit of politics with the mailman on that route. And it was during that brief pause that the *News* delivery truck, tossing the bundles out at each corner, brought the first extras covering the First National Bank looting.

"Elbows" McCoy, boss newsie at Commercial and Fifth, knifed open the first bundle, broke out the top *News*, snapped it into Mike Cooper's hand, and said, "Read all about it, big boy. Hass Mob Loots First National—$110,000 Taken In Daylight Raid!"

THOSE were the headlines, big and black. In the small box beneath, Mike Cooper read that a mob, recognized as the Hoss Hass gang, working with handkerchief-covered faces, had pulled the job in an elapsed time of exactly three minutes. There were, according to reliable onlookers, eight hoodlums in the party.

Eight? Mike Cooper knew for a fact

that Hoss Hass had walked out of the Hall with only six finely-dressed thugs. So that made a party of seven, not eight. Still and all, Hass had only four with him when he arrived.

And as for this being a Hass job—hell, that was out of the question. Why, with no peak-hour traffic to buck, even without an alarm-closed Avenue, a walker could hardly make that trip from the Hall to the First National building, on the off, north side of Civic Center, and back, in twenty-three minutes. As for using a taxi, or any other car, that would be slower than walking. Hass mob, nothing! Every mug covered by a handkerchief isn't a Hass thug!

Before 2:30 there was another extra on the street. This one carried headlines saying: "Hoss Hass Comes In." The brief news matter made known the startling fact that Hass's lawyer had surrendered the big shot. Now closeted with the D. A., the account went on to tell, Hoss Hass's attorney denied that his client had any connection with the First National robbery. Mr. Hass, according to his high-powered legal front, was in a position to prove that he was in the Hall of Justice prior to, during and after the stated time of the outrage.

At 2:35 a radio car located Officer Mike Cooper down among the brownstones on Commercial. A relief copper stepped out of the rear seat. He said, "I'm taking over for you, Mike. Hop in and take a ride to the D. A.'s office. They want you in a hurry. Say, where do you rate all this attention?"

The D. A. and his corps of deputies were on hand in the large room that Officer Mike Cooper shortly reached. Commissioner-of-Public-Safety Hall and Police Captain Greentree were there too. Harness bulls were on both doors. There were stenogs and clerks waiting silently. Four others of great importance were on deck: Mr. Hoss Hass and a battery of three lawyers.

Commissioner Hall, red with rage, stutteringly mad, was pacing back and forth before the D. A.'s desk. In the commissioner's right hand was a traffic ticket. The D. A.'s face was as unreadably blank as a countenance can be. Right away, Mike Cooper knew that the D. A. and Hall were deadlocked again. Hall was the man whose men brought 'em in, while the D. A.'s office seemed to put 'em back in circulation again.

Officer Cooper reported to his superior. That pacing man stopped pacing, handed Mike Cooper the traffic ticket and said, "Is that ticket in order, Cooper? Is that Hass' signature—and yours? Did you write it out? Is the time correct?"

Officer Mike Cooper glanced at the ticket.

"It's in order, sir," he said.

Hoss Hass laughed.

"Mr. District Attorney," one of the three lawyers said, "you'll kindly have the uniform on the door stand aside."

"Not so fast, Scott!" Police Captain Greentree snapped. He turned to Mike Cooper.

"Officer," he asked "why did you write out this ticket when the overpark time was only three minutes?"

"Well, sir," Mike Cooper answered, "Hass had a sidewalk audience. He asked for the ticket."

"Establishing an alibi, eh!" Commissioner Hall roared. "How about that, Hass? What do you say, Attorney Scott?"

"Prove it," was all Attorney Scott said.

The D. A. sat there monkeying with a pencil that wouldn't stand on end. When neither Hall nor Greentree came forward with any immediate suggestions, the D. A. drawled:

"Well, how about it, Commissioner—have you got enough to hold Mr. Hass? Your witnesses saw no uncovered faces. Nobody has been produced who either

saw the robbers arrive at or depart the bank. As for Mr. Hass' unquestioned presence at the Hall of Justice and the time element to be considered in this case, I understand that the avenue, which had to be crossed were we to assume that Mr. Hass was involved, was closed to all cross-town traffic because of a fire alarm for nearly ten minutes, therefore—"

"Just a moment, Mr. District Attorney," Officer Cooper cut in. He turned to his superior. "Captain Greentree, do you know anything about that downtown fire?"

"Yes," the captain answered. "I made the run myself. It was a false alarm from box No. 44, at the corner of Second and Bay.

"The garage at the southwest corner of Second and Bay belongs to Hass," Mike Cooper told his listeners. "That, as you know, sir, is where the hot cars are worked over. Guess it isn't at all funny, sir, that a false alarm should come in from that box at just that time."

"A lead-foot like you, Cooper," Hoss Hass said, "can learn too damn much for his own comfort. Don't forget, copper, that the papers say there were eight mugs in on the National job. If you—"

"If you don't pipe down, Hass," Commissioner Hall said, moving in Hass' direction, "I'll hot-foot your damned sitter with such gusto that you'll think you're having a preview of the chair."

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" the D. A. begged. "Now let's look at this from a grown-up point of view. This false alarm theory, or supposition, is just that—supposition. We're supposed to indict only when in possession of a modicum of tangible, logical evidence. And now, Mr. Commissioner, have you the reasonable evidence? Can you hold Mr. Hass for a hearing?"

"That's up to you," Hall snapped. "We've delivered the rat, again, or at least scared him in. What do you say?"

"Officer," the D. A. said to the man on the main door, "you may stand aside. I'm a busy man. I can give no more of my time to inter-departmental friction."

Hoss Hass and his three legal strongmen were chatting very merrily as they strode toward the battery of elevators, one of which would carry them down into the fine, clean air of freedom.

"Damn it, Cooper, you should never have done it!" Police Captain Greentree was saying as they, with Commissioner Hall, stopped in the long corridor to talk. "Hell, man, you knew that we didn't want to give Hass any easy legal dodges. Then you let him get your Irish up and talk you out of a ticket. The rat knew that you'd establish his alibi."

"What a damned mess, Cooper!" said Commissioner Hall.

CHAPTER II

MISSING

WITH his Irish up, Officer Mike Cooper started down the corridor toward the elevators. There were groups of lawyers, heelers, healers and just ordinary people in that marble passageway, but Mike Cooper wasn't seeing any of them. He'd been made the goat, and it was a leveling feeling. His brother would never let him hear the end of this. Yes, he was an F-man all right—just a bungling flattie.

Somebody quit lounging against a door-jamb, said, "Keep your tail up, Mike," and walked beside him. It was Agent M. M. Mills, one of his brother John's side-kicks.

"Oh, hello," Mike said. "What's on your mind?"

"That brother of yours," Agent Mills said, staring down into the mid-afternoon bustle of Civic Center. "Have you seen Jack since noon, Mike?"

"Not since breakfast," Mike answered. "Why?"

"Well, Jack's missing," Mills said slowly. "I've called your mother, and he hasn't been home or called her since noon. Anyway, it's this way: When Hoss Hass and his gang stepped out of their car at the Hall this noon, Jack, Jim Call and myself were one taxi behind them. We got out of the taxi at the corner, while Hass was ribbing you. Jim Call went down Fifth to keep an eye on that door. I stayed on the corner to watch the Avenue side. Jack went into the Hall, behind a newspaper and right past you, while Hass was checking his time with yours. Remember?"

"Damned right I do!" said Officer Mike Cooper. "Say do you people escort Hass everywhere, all the time?"

"Believe it or not, Mike," Agent Mills said, "Hoss Hass doesn't even sleep alone."

"But he seems to knock over banks alone," Mike said bitterly.

"Something slipped, "Agent Mills admitted. "That's where Jack figures in. Call says that Hass and his mob didn't come out the Fifth Street door. You and I know that they didn't come back through the main door until after the job had been pulled. However, that's water over the dam. What's bothering us now is—why didn't Jack come out? Jim Call and I have combed the Hall of Justice. Call's still there. Where you going?"

"Just as I thought," Mike Cooper answered. "Let's dodge into this office. I want to telephone. Got an angle that might give us somethin'. Then again, chances it won't."

While Officer Mike Cooper called the clerk of Traffic Court, asking that a tracer be put on a certain traffic ticket handed out that day by Officer Mike Cooper—he made the ticket identification from his book's carbon copy—he told about the gorilla taxi driver who had so obligingly pulled out and made room for Hass' car.

"It's one that I muffed, up till now," Mike admitted. "I haven't a doubt in the world that that mug was a Hass ape, and that—Hello, Cooper still on. What did you learn?"

Officer Cooper hung up.

"Just as I expected," he said. "There's no such taxi driver licensed, and there's no such taxi registered. The license numbers, so the clerk says, were stolen six months ago. Well, that's that. Maybe it's somethin', perhaps nothin'."

Mills snapped his fingers. "Look—why couldn't that gorilla have stalled around and made the quick link between the Hall and First National."

"But he didn't stall," Mike said. "Traffic was heavy, goin' north on the avenue, and that bird had to keep movin'."

"But he might have picked Hass and his four mugs up," Agent Mills insisted.

"How?" Officer Mike Cooper asked.

"*How* be damned!" said Mills. "Let's forget the how and look for the why of Jack's failure to show."

Officer Mike Cooper went off shift at 4:30. Between that time and seven o'clock—the hour he reached home—many places had been visited, many people contacted. He had covered the Hall of Justice from basement to blind attic.

As for Agents Mills and Call, they had been joined by a half dozen more men of that federal branch, but nothing of Jack Cooper's whereabouts had been discovered.

"I've been waiting supper for you boys all evening," Mother Cooper said. "Johnnie's too, both of you, and he's not home yet. He didn't call me to say he'd be late, either. Where've you been, Mikie?"

"Oh, I met Mills," Mike said. "He's one of Jack's outfit. There was a bank robbery in the Center district this noon, and Mills and myself have been sort of

workin' a few angles since quittin' time. I'll be shovin' off again, ma, soon's I eat. Where's Larry?"

"Larry just went down to the drug store," Mrs. Cooper said.

The telephone rang. Mrs. Cooper answered. Mike heard her say: "I'll look, Larry. Just hold the line."

On her way from the room, she said, "Larry's mislaid his money. He wants me to see if he left it in his room."

When she returned to the phone, Mrs. Cooper said, "Larry? No, it isn't in your room. Oh, that's too bad. Yes, I'll look again, but you come home. Good-by."

MOTHER COOPER went back to Larry's room, there to make a more thorough search. Mike, even before removing his harness and before washing for supper, stood under the kitchen light and scanned the evening paper. The front page, of course, was all First National robbery news; and, right there in a subheadline, was stated the fact that Officer Michael Cooper was claimed by Hass' defense as an alibi witness.

Mrs. Cooper, half hiding something under her apron, sort of crept back into the kitchen. Mike, sensing that something was wrong, glanced over his paper and asked, "What's wrong, ma? Did you see your own ghost, or somethin'?"

"Oh, I don't know's it's anything," she said. "But look, Mikie. Is it all right for Larry to have this in his room?"

Mike took a zipper-closed briefcase from his mother's slowly extended hand. He zipped it open.

"A gun," he said. "Jeepers!"

"It was under Larry's pillow," the mother said. "I thought perhaps his billfold had been lost on the bed, maybe. That's how I happened to find this, Mikie."

A gun in a briefcase! Well, that wasn't new. Come to think of it, a few of Hoss Hass' thugs were snuggling some sort of legal-looking briefcases under their arms when they hurried in the Hall of Justice.

"No, never mind the grub, ma," big Mike was saying. "Huh? No. No, the kid has no right with this automatic. Look, ma; did you ever see this gun before? Or any other gun, in Larry's room?"

"No, Mikie. Why? Is there something awful wrong? Don't look that way, Mikie," Mother Cooper begged, half sobbed. "Come on, eat your supper."

"Just a cup of coffee," Mike said. "I won't take off the coat, ma. I've got to go downtown again. Guess maybe Larry'll be goin' with me. Now, quit your worryin', ma. Pour that cup of Java for me. Step on it or I'll knock ya ears back, ma. You and your high-powered frettin'!"

While Mike Cooper sipped a cup of too-hot-for-comfort coffee, Larry arrived. Mike, disliking the job of jumping the kid, gave no immediate recognition to the arrival.

"Oh, Alibi Mike in person!" Larry said. "Say, copper, who're you working for, eh?"

"Sit down!" Mike said.

"What? You giving me orders, feller?"

"You heard me—sit!" Mike sat, and so did Larry. "How come you didn't report to old Shane before 1:30 this noon?"

"Who wants to know? Who said I didn't?" Larry barked.

"Old Shane said you didn't."

"Say, listen. What Shane doesn't know about things that happen at the Hall would fill lots of big books," Larry made known. "Not that's any of your business, Mike, but you've got ma all ears now—so I'll tell you that I was on the job by 10:10."

"Old Shane didn't know it. That's funny," Mike said.

"Not funny at all!" Larry growled. "I tell you, the guy's old. He can't see

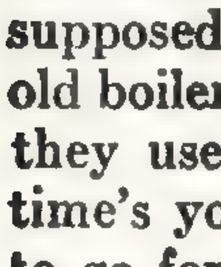
good, and his savvy is slipping. Half the time he doesn't know me from "Stir" Marco. He calls Stir 'Laurence me bi' and me 'Marco ya devil'; and it was to Stir that I reported in, at 10:10."

"And who's Marco—not that ex-con, the probation mug that hangs around the Hall?" Mike asked.

"That's him. He's sort of a straw boss under old Shane. Stir says he could have old Shane's job if he wanted it. Stir has a drag. Deputy District Attorney Magio, that's his cousin. Old Shane doesn't dare tell Stir not to do this or that.

"Well, anyway, when I got there this morning, Stir was down in the supply room. He was laughing. He told me that old Broom Shane wouldn't bother us much this morning. I asked Stir why. He said that he had gone up on the twelfth floor to put Judge Mulligan's chambers in order. 'Keep this under your derby, Cooper,' Stir said, 'I went up there, first thing this morning, and messed up the place myself. Cooper, you and me can have it pretty soft here with that old son out of the way. We're supposed to clean the west basement, the old boiler-room, and them old bins where they used to keep the coal. But your time's your own, and I'll tell you when to go for lunch. And say, when you go for lunch take a full hour, see? T'hell with this half hour racket.'

"And that," Larry concluded, "was how come old Shane didn't even know I was on the job. It's none of my biz, but Stir was giving old Broom the run-around for some reason. He just got the old buck busy on the twelfth floor so's he could pull something. You know how it is with any city stock room—the guys on the inside are always peddling the supplies for a little quick jack."



"YOU gettin' in on any of that quick jack?" Mike asked.

"Not me," Larry said "Look, Mike. I know my own speed. I wouldn't have the guts to run with the mob that Stir plays round with. What I mean, they're tough people, Mike.

"Look what happened only this noon. When I put in this extra work, old Broom usually makes me take the one-to-one-thirty half hour for lunch. But, as I just told you, Stir said he'd let me know when to go out this time. Well, just before one this noon, one of these real hard taxi pirates came down for a few words with Stir. They didn't talk long, but right away I knew they were lining up some fast stuff; and as soon as the taxi guy had gone upstairs Stir came back to where I was sweeping in the old boiler-room.

"'All right, Cooper,' Stir said, 'Get t'hell gone for lunch. Don't forget what I told you—take the full hour. This is on me, kid. And you better duck out the alley door so's you won't run into old Shane by mistake. Scram!'

"Well," Larry continued, "I went right then, just a few minutes before one, but I didn't go out through the alley door. I wanted to see Ben Ahern, over in the central heating plant, about going to the fights tomorrow night, so I ducked out through the tunnel."

"Tunnel?" Officer Mike Cooper was on his feet by then. "What tunnel—where's a tunnel?"

Larry stared in surprise.

"Why," he said, "the pipe tunnel. The tunnel that carries the steam pipes from the Civic Center heating plant to the Hall. How do you suppose they get the steam across the avenue—by radio?"

"Go ahead with your yarn," Mike said tightly.

"Well, that's about all, except that I want to show you how much you coppers don't know about this man's city. See this mouse under my left eye?"

Officer Mike Cooper took a closer squint at his younger brother.

"Been scrappin', eh?" he surmised.

"Yes and no," said Larry. "This was what happened. I went through the tun-

"You givin' me orders, feller?"

nel, under the avenue, to the central heating plant. As a rule Ben Ahern is on afternoon duty there alone during this time of the year. The tunnel comes out right in the boiler-room of the plant. Ben wasn't there, but there was another guy on duty. He was a new one on me, and he was standing in the alley door, looking down the alley L toward Sixth street. I said, 'Where's Ahern, feller?'

"This new guy gave a start. 'Who? What?' he snaps. 'That guy ain't here. Scram outa here!"

"'What? You giving me orders, feller?' I said—and at that, this new mug made a pass at me. I wasn't on guard, Mike, or the bird'd never've copped me. I went down. Yeah, he sure did tilt me back on my heels. And that's how come I got this shanty. Well, I got up and went at him, forced him into the alley, too. I'd have taken the guy, Mike, but a taxi came in from Sixth, and the driver hopped out and joined up with this other guy. Believe it or not, I think that this mug driver was the same one that I saw talking with Stir just before Stir told me to scram. And right away, I got the set-up, Mike. This new guy in the heating plant had got Ben Ahern off the job someway, and Stir, this taxi guy and him were going to carry the supplies through the tunnel. It's been done before. Well, as I just told you, I know my own speed. So I got away from that plant before they took me apart."

"Nice work, Larry. Nice goin'," Mike said. "You sure did yourself proud."

"Don't rub it in!" Larry snapped. "You ain't kidding me, copper."

"Guess I'm not," Mike agreed. "But I'm wonderin' if you're kiddin' me, kid. Just one more little thing before I go. Where did you get this?"

Larry found himself gazing at the automatic. His face froze.

"Where did you get that?" he finally yelled, coming to his feet and reaching.

Mike pushed him back. "The question is: where did you get this?" Officer Mike repeated, and he did it in a bit of a yell, too.

Mrs. Cooper had been silent. Now she said, "Tell Mikie, Larry. He didn't find the gun in your room. It was me, Larry. I was hunting around your bed. Tell Mikie what he wants to know. Larry, your brother Johnnie's missing, or hurt, or—"

"Where do you get that stuff, ma?" Mike demanded, trying to put something of lightness into his voice. "Who told you—"

"You didn't have to tell me, Mikie," the mother said. "I knew it when his office called, then called again and again, this afternoon. And I knew it when you walked in, when you came home and wouldn't eat, or even remove your belt. And I saw the evening paper, too. This awful Hass fellow, robbing again. Hoss Hass and my boys! . . . Mikie, was Johnnie—was he—?"

"He was, ma," big Mike said, knowing that his mother had had to take it before—the first Officer Mike Cooper had been gunned to death in a fur-loft robbery—and that she could handle it now. "He was tailing Hass. He's sorta missin'."

"OKAY, ma," Larry said. "I found this gun, just as it is, in the tunnel, Mike. That was about 3:15, I think. Old Broom Shane was back in the basement about then and I wanted a smoke. So I took a duck into the tunnel. We always do that. Anyway, that's where I found the gun. About midway of the Avenue, right near the manhole. I always go in that far and sit on the manhole cover while I smoke. Sometimes Ben Ahern and a few of the guys from the heating plant come in from their end and we chew the fat."

"What's this manhole thing?" Mike asked.

"Well, there's a storm drain—it isn't a sewer manhole—that crosses under the floor of the tunnel. According to Ben, it used to drain the Dutch Flats district before the new south-channel outfall system was dredged five-six years ago. We had the cover off one day. The drain is dry now. It's so deep under the floor of the tunnel that we couldn't see the bottom. One of the heating-plant guys claims that the bottom is seventy-five feet lower than the tunnel's floor."

"Never mind the sightseein'," Mike cut in. "Look—have you been handlin' this gun? And another thing, why didn't you turn this over to somebody at the Hall? You should know it might be hot."

"I didn't put a mitt on it," Larry said. "Do you think I'd handle a gun like this after hearing you and Jack talk fingerprints? No, I just zipped it open, saw what I had, said 'there's twenty-five found bucks,' zipped it closed, then went back in the basement and hid the thing behind some junk in a corner. And that's why I didn't turn it over to anybody at the Hall. Twenty-five bucks, why should I hand that to old Broom Shane or Stir or anybody else? When you surrender lost articles like this, they're lost again, as far as you're concerned. And—"

The telephone rang.

Over the phone Mike said: "Oh, hello, Mills. . . . No, nothin' new, not a word yet. Yes, I'm goin' back to the Hall right now. Got a new angle I want to work. Listen. I'm goin' to send a little somethin' down to you, as soon as a taxi can get there. I want you to look this thing over for fingerprints. It was picked up where you and I spent more than an hour this afternoon. Will you be over there later? Okay, then you can let me know what you learn. Be seein' you."

Officer Mike Cooper turned then to the small task of getting paper and string with which to wrap the briefcase in a slipshod, non-important-looking bundle.

Midway of that job, he sort of stopped and stared at Larry with a puzzled expression on his face.

"Say," he asked, "why didn't we spot the entrance to the pipe tunnel when we were combing the Hall's basement—and where were you while Mills was there in the boiler-room?"

"Well, I just told you that I ducked into the tunnel for a smoke about 3:15, when I found this case. While I was in there, two plain clothes dicks came in. Guess perhaps they were some of Jack's outfit. I know most of the city's snoops. I heard them and Stir talking; and Stir gave me the office to stay where I was. You see, Mike, when we do a duck on old Shane, whoever's in the boiler-room just stands there and talks to Broom, and at the same time keeps up a drumming with his fingers on the nearest tin fire-door he can reach. Well, Stir was doing that and I kept the door closed."

"What door? I opened every door down there," Mike said.

"No you didn't," Larry told him. "You remember that row of six fire doors at the west end of the boiler-room, right under the sidewalk's deadlights? Those six were all closed, eh? And each one has a sign on it saying: 'Do Not Open—Emergency Coal—Full Bin.' Well, the first five bins are full, just as the signs say. The last bin, way back in the dark corner, is where they brought the pipe tunnel in. It's the same kind of a door as the other five. The sign on it was Stir's idea. I was with him when he put it there two-three weeks ago. Why, even while I was in there, and the two plain-clothes guys were trying to get something out of Stir, old Broom came in. I had the tunnel door cracked a bit and I could see them when they came over alongside the boilers. They came back as far as the fourth door, and even old Broom said: 'Gint'lmen, thim's all filled-up cool binses. A-mer-gincy cool it is.'"

"And he said the same thing to Mills, Call and myself at about 5:30," Mike mumbled. "The danged old dub!"

Mike had finished wrapping his package. He said, "Keep a stiff upper lip, ma," to his mother. Then, handing Larry the wrapped briefcase, "Call yourself a taxi, get that down to the F.B.I. office, and ask for Mills. Try to carry it as though it didn't amount to anything. Then get back here, Larry, and put in the evenin' with ma. As soon as I learn anything, I'll give you a ring. Well, I'll be shovin' off."

CHAPTER III

LADDER OF DEATH

THERE were a few floors of the Hall of Justice showing lights when Officer Mike Cooper arrived there shortly after eight. Those lights were where janitors were working, or where night court was in session. There were a few lounging groups in the lower corridor. Mike walked down the long corridor to Information. Mowat was night officer on duty there. He looked up from his paper and said, "How're ya, Mike? What you doin' down here? Say, this was a hell of a nasty break you got in the Hass mess. What can I do for you?"

They were alone. Mike said, "I'm workin' an angle of this Hass thing now, Sid. Liten—if any of the Federal crowd come lookin' for me, tell 'em to go down to the boiler-room. Say they'll find the sixth coal-bin door open. They'll undertand. And by the way, Sid, I might call on you."

Officer Sid Mowat rolled his eyes toward all those upper floors of the Hall.

"Not for a while, Mike," he said. "I can't take a chance quittin' this post, not for a minute. Commissioner Hall and Captain Greentree're in the buildin'. I understand they're callin' a special session of the grand jury tonight. I don't know if it's for Hoss Hass or for the D.A. They's hell poppin!"

Officer Mike Cooper found one dim bulb burning in the basement's main passageway, but the old boiler-room at the west end was in darkness, save for the dim glimmer under the avenue's sidewalk deadlights. The six closed gravity-slide doors stood as a wall under that faint light. Grabbing slice bar from its hook, Mike made his way along the boiler's side to the sixth and last door. He pushed it open, propped the slice bar against its gravity closing, then took his first look into that under-the-avenue tunnel.

There was plenty of headroom, the ceiling being all of seven feet above the sand floor. The sides and ceiling were of rough cement. Along the right, north side of the long tunnel, racked to the cement wall, was a staff of pipes. Under them, carried on cement cross-cradles in the sand floor, was a larger, ten-inch pipe, perhaps a water main. Along the left side of the passageway were power and light conduits.

Down the center of the tunnel, pretty well crowded by those side-wall utilities, was a sand path; and the whole place carried that dank, under-ground smell that, leading into darkness, gives a man a preview of the grave.

Hesitating hardly long enough to take note of any of this, he pulled his electric flash and began trying to locate a light switch. He had no luck. He flashed his beam down at the tunnel, searching the cement ceiling. Yes, there were caged bulbs at about thirty-foot intervals. But no switch. Chances were, the only one was over at the Civic Center end of the tunnel, fully two hundred yards away.

Mike Cooper had no more time for switch hunting; for Mike Cooper was strongly hunched that time was running out on him—or, perhaps, on somebody else.

But his electric flash! It seemed weak. It *was* weak; even as he fanned it along the door jamb, taking one last look for a switch, he saw the circle of light lose power.

Flashing the light only now and then, holding to that narrow, sandy center path, Mike Cooper went westward in the tunnel.

He spotted the manhole cover. Here, the hunch told him, would be something, or—nothing. If nothing, then he was back exactly where he had been before getting all this inside dope from Larry. Back there except for the gun. And if he was right—

Mike Cooper was afraid that he was too right, but he got his big mitts into the manhole cover's hand-holes and heaved it off. Then he picked up the torch that was fading fast, played its failing glow down the deep manhole.

It sure was deep. There was the usual ladder of grabbing bars, lengths of reinforcement steel built into the masonry of the vertical shaft's north side. Mike Cooper played his dimming light down that ladder. A good twenty feet from the top, bunched against the manhole's side wall like something draped through the rounds of the grab-bar ladder, was a mass that didn't move. The electric flash's light was still strong enough to tell Officer Mike Cooper the worst. That dark-gray suit—on the motionless, draped mass—was Jack's dark-gray tweed.

"Jack! D'ya hear me, feller?" Mike tried just on an off-chance that there was still life there, life that could hear, make some sort of an answer. But no life showed, and there was no answer.

"Comin', boy! Comin' right at you, Jack! Hold what you've got, kid!" said Mike Cooper, giving himself a cheer against the hellish, hollow quiet of the place and got under way.

No time to go back for helpers. No time to spare, for too much time had been lost already. It was 8:20 or later; and Jack, tailing Hass's party, had gone through the Hall's main doors at 1:07. More than eight hours ago. Eight hours hanging like that, head down!

JACK COOPER shot any weighing machine's indicating pointer well up toward the two-hundred mark. Mike himself was over the two hundred mark, and the weight didn't do a man one bit of good when he faced a job like this one. This was going to be a job that called for a man—perhaps only a big harness bull, but a man nevertheless.

Mike Cooper, as soon as he went down over the iron lip of the manhole, discovered that the steel grab bars were slick with ancient slime. That was a discovery close to tragedy, but there was nothing he could do about it. So he gripped his torch between his teeth and gave both hands to the job.

Step by step, steps that slithered and slipped, Mike lowered himself. The dim light tossed strange shadows around him; not clean-cut, distinct, but weak things like the torch itself, for the light was fading.

Then he reached Jack, and saw what had happened. He reached down and pulled the skirt of Jack's tweed coat from over his head; and the head was split, with a deep, matted bash. The whole face was bloody—dry, blackish blood. Jack's right leg had gone through one grab bar, and his foot and ankle through a second; and that was the reason for his being draped there in that manner.

Mike could see it: the Hass gang had slugged Jack, either back in the boiler-room or there in the tunnel, then threw him down the manhole. Perhaps Jack hadn't been out cold. Maybe he was fighting to the last. That would mean that the Hass mob must have shoved him down feet first; and falling feet first, the right foot and leg had gone through the grab bar's loop.

Larry had said that the manhole was about seventy-five feet deep. Far better this than a full-distance fall to the shaft's floor. Still and all, Mike's first glance at Jack's head and face seemed to tell him that the whole distance couldn't be worse than this.

No reason now for Mike Cooper to go panicky, just because this was his own brother. Hell, men are tough things. They're never dead till they smell that way. And a Cooper was as tough as the next one!

But that danged electric flash! It was counting seconds on Mike Cooper. Its light was like something that was going far, far away, something that you knew would never come back; and the mighty darkness was crowding into that dank, foul-smelling hole.

Far above, through it all, Mike could hear the soft roll, purr and pound of traffic on the avenue. All that life up there, and this little chunk of hell down here, a chunk of hell that might not be discovered for hours, or days, if anything went wrong now. But this was the thing for which a city pays harness bulls.

"Come on, G-man! Sit yourself up," Officer Mike Cooper said to his brother. Mike had hooked his own left leg down through the same grab bar that had arrested Jack's fall. His right foot was braced on the second bar lower. The dim torch then went back into his teeth, and he was pulling Jack to an upright position.

THE glow from the torch was so dim now that it hardly reached Jack's face when that bloody smear came up close to Mike's. So Mike spit the thing out, and his heart stood still, waiting to hear that torch hit bottom. It was a long way, that drop.

Total darkness then. And no sign of breathing in the man around whose limp bulk Officer Mike had bent his strong left arm. Holding Jack in that position was no easy thing. But Mike had to do far more than just hold, so he went to work on his next job. Taking his right hand off the ladder, with the grab bar cutting hell out of his weight-carrying, hooked left knee, Officer Mike Cooper unbuckled himself from that much ma-

ligned piece of copper harness, his broad midriff belt. With the belt pulled free, Mike managed to work its length under Jack's left arm across his chest, then back under the right arm. With both ends meeting again, Mike worked the buckle's tongue through the first hole in the belt's tip. In the total darkness, working only with his right hand and teeth, that was no small detail, but it was carried out.

Mike then put his right hand back on the ladder, two rounds higher than the one through which his left leg was hooked. He brought his left arm through the belt, heaved all the slack out, then lifted.

Not so good! In the darkness, he could feel Jack's limp arms come upward. Any more of that and Jack would slither out of the belt like a loose sack of meal. But if he was loose and limp like that, he must have life in him! That gave Mike new hope, something to work for.

Mike settled back, with his left arm holding Jack in place as before. Next, Mike worked both of his brother's hands around behind his back. Then Officer Mike Cooper went for his cuffs. His deft, practiced right hand snapped those manacles on Jack's wrists; and there'd be no more slipping out of that harness belt after that.

After that, Officer Mike Cooper rested for a few seconds, because he needed the let-up—and, worst of all, because that cramped left leg had started to go to sleep on him. The realization broke Officer Mike Cooper into a cold sweat. This job ahead was going to call for legs. Legs of a good, strong horse. 'Strong like a horse.' Jack's own words. Mike would have to be that now. . . . Ah, thank God, he was working the sleep out of that left leg! Better get going while the going's good.

Again he lifted the slack out of the belt. He worked his left leg out from behind its grab bar, then planted that big left foot down with its right mate, two rounds lower than the one over which Jack still slouched. Up along Jack's spine, in through the belt, Mike worked his head. When the belt came under his chin, against his throat, he was set.

He jacked himself rigid, to a full stand. The belt, carrying most of Jack's weight, jabbed the white collar into his Adam's apple. He eased off, ripped the collar away.

The time to start moving had arrived. Again he took the full weight of Jack's great poundage on the belt, and on his neck. Mike made the step up to the next round.

Jack was wedged there pretty neat. There wasn't much give to the limp man. It would take a mighty heave, and with damp, slippery bars under hand and foot. Not a soft thing to buck, but it had to be.

Into the next upward step Mike Cooper put all his strength. Up and out came Jack's legs, with a wracking tug that almost shook Mike loose of his hold. But they were on their way, and that was the big thing. Jack was pulled loose, and onto Mike's back. That dead weight against Mike's throat was a killing load, especially there in the black where a man had nothing left but feel of hand.

Even looking upward, he could not see where the manhole opened into the tunnel. Not a single, small glow of light. It struck Officer Mike Cooper that a man seldom meets up with total darkness like that—unless he is dead. And if he didn't make the lip of that shaft soon, there'd be two dead men in that old shaft.

Strong fellers, horses. Never get any place wearing harness. Hell! Jack was wrong there. He wasn't going any place right now, were that harness to fail. And if the Mike horse failed—strangling against the garroting the belt was giving him, he wouldn't have taken any bets that he wasn't going to fail. Oh, well, all a good horse can do is put

everything he has into the collar, then hold what he wins, and try for new ground. And if the harness held, and his legs didn't buckle, or his hoofs slip—

Mike's feet did slip! Both feet went off the slimy grab bar. Then there was a nasty, arm-wracking jolt, and the double neck-breaking load, dangled at arms' length—dangled, feet trying for a new hold in that utter, dank blackness.

Out of that predicament, somehow, Mike Cooper fought his way. His feet found another slick bar of steel. He hooked both arms through the grab bar to which he had hung, then took time out for another rest. And up there, up in the direction of the dim noises of the avenue, there was a manhole's opening. Just how far up there, Mike Cooper could not tell. Nor even guess. For there was no light. Nothing but more slippery bars of steel, more strangling work, more minutes; and time, he had a hunch, was running out on him.

UP IN in the Hall of Justice, along the main corridor, there was much activity. Word had leaked that Commissioner of Public Safety Hall and Police Captain Greentree were behind closed doors with the special session of the grand jury. The newshawks were clamoring for information; and Officer Sid Mowat, there on Information, was of absolutely no help. He didn't even tell them what he had hinted to Mike Cooper. But what he had hinted was a fact—Commissioner Hall was demanding a showdown. He demanded of that grand jury only one thing: that they hand up a true bill, a blanket indictment for the D.A., three of that high official's deputies, Hoss Hass and at least twelve John Does.

"Give us those John Does," Hall demanded, "and we'll put real names to 'em before morning. And every name will be a Hass name."

The D.A. and his deputies, of course, weren't in that room; but the foreman of the jury was leaning backward in his attempt to be too damned judicial.

"Your own department—this Officer Cooper—puts you in a spot, Commissioner," the foreman argued. "Why, hell, first thing we know somebody will be asking us to indict Cooper along with the rest."

"Cooper is the goat!" Commissioner Hall wailed, paced that floor, and tore his hair. "Cooper is a good officer. Cooper can tell you gentlemen how Hass built up this alibi, step by step. Cooper —"

"Why isn't this man Cooper here?" the foreman cut in.

"He'll be here!" Hall barked. "Give me fifteen minutes and I'll get Officer Cooper here for you."

The presiding judge declared a fifteen-minute recess. Hall and Captain Greentree tore out the room like righteousness in full cry after a visible devil. They didn't wait for elevators, almost taking to the balustrades, like kids, in their downward rush.

"Mowat! Officer Mowat!" Commissioner Hall snapped, coming, winded, to Information. "Mowat, you stand relieved. Get in my car and have the driver run you out to Officer Mike Cooper's. Tell Cooper that I want him here at the Hall, as is. *As is*, Mowat. Don't let him stop—"

"Cooper? Mike Cooper, sir?" Mowat stammered. "He's here in the building, sir. Or he was, just after eight."

"Just after eight!" Hall wailed. It's 9:45 now. Just after—"

There was a slow, measured clambering, a stumbling dragging of heavy feet, on the basement stairs alongside the elevator shafts. Hall, Greentree and Mowat looked that way. Loungers and newshawks began moving that way. Then, with an incongruous pitch and toss; two men seemed to zoom the last few steps of the basement stairs and spread themselves across the marble slabs of the corridor. They were strapped together, back to back, neck to chest,

and the binding strap was a harness bull's stout belt. The man in gray tweeds, he with the bracelets on, seemed dead. And the copper in the ruined uniform was black-blue in the face. Neither spoke. Neither moved. For once, the Cooper boys were close together, and not scrapping.

Commissioner Hall, standing there watching Officer Mowat get busy removing the belt, just said, "What'n hell is this?"

Captain Greentree also said, "What'n hell. This dead man is Jack Cooper, Mike's brother. But what'n—"

"He isn't dead, sir," Mowat said. "There's life here. He's warm, and limp. A badly fractured right thigh, maybe a skull fracture. We'd better get them to the Kentucky Street Receiving Hospital, sir."

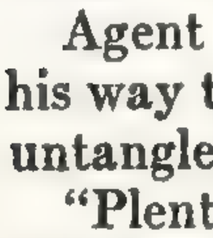
"Use my car," Commissioner Hall said. "Here, you men, bear a hand and help earn your stories. There's a story here some place. If Mike Cooper could only speak! If—"

"He can, sir," that mighty man said. "Get Jack under way, sir. I'll stay. I'll come out of this—in a minute. I'm all right—give me some water. Oh, hello, Mills. What did'ya learn?"

Agent M. M. Mills had shouldered his way through the group that had fully untangled the Cooper brothers.

"Plenty, Mike," Agent Mills said. "The fingerprints were okay—and the right ones."

Commissioner Hall and Captain Greentree, each giving Officer Cooper a helping arm, started for the elevator. Agent Mills was right along. Hall and Greentree, though they had no idea of the new Jack Cooper angle, were going back to that closeted grand jury with fire in their eyes.



AT TEN next morning, when the police surgeon at Receiving Hospital said that Mrs. Cooper, Mike and Larry could see the patient, Jack had just passed the stage where everything was big, hollow, pink-hued and whirly.

"Hello, ma," Jack said through his haze. "Guess they kinda got me, didn't they, Mike. Two-three of those Hass men . . . behind me. . . . Was in the boiler-room—"

"Hold it, Jack," Mike said. "It's all washed clean, kid. By 10:30 last night, Hall had indictments from the grand jury. By eleven, your office told us that Hoss Hass and his mob were puttin' on a celebration out at the Channel Boat Club. Well, Jack, a little after eleven-thirty we had that joint covered by a dozen of our boys and seven of your crowd.

"Hass had a chance to come out. But he didn't come right away. Then the blastin' started. When it was all over, and we went in, Hoss Hass was a dead one. Four of his mugs were too. The D.A. and three of his deputies were in the joint; and one of the deputies was washed out. We took three other Hass men and a tough taxi driver—a mug that I was lookin' for.

"It seems, Jack, that this taxi mug and just one of the Hass mob made a run with the money after the First National was knocked over. And all the jack was in the joint—the whole mess of it, $110,000. They were makin' the split when we came down on them.

"And another thing, Jack. . . . Are ya listenin'? Just this, and we'll be goin'. . . . Larry here found a gun in the Hall's pipe tunnel. It was Hass' own rod. Guess one of his carriers dropped the case when they dumped you in the manhole. . . . Yeah, that's where you spent the afternoon and evenin'. The gun brought the grand jury over. . . . Is this Larry kid there, Jack, or isn't he?"

"He's a colt, Mike. Just a colt. Maybe he'll grow up to be a great big, strong horse. . . . Great fellers, you horses. Great guys, but you'll never get. . . ."

"Let's go, ma," Officer Mike Cooper said. "Jack's beginnin' to be himself again. He'll be all right."

"You got him, Red!"

SAGINAW

By RAY MILLHOLLAND

KNEES bent, steel calks biting into a big white pine stick, Saginaw shot the rapids above the mill pond and poled his tricky craft over to the boom. With his turkey strapped on his broad, flat back and a double-bitted Michigan ax showing over his left shoulder, he trod the chained logs of the mill pond boom to shore.

Fifty yards up Rapid City's main and only street he swung into Gus Fischer's place and ordered what a lumberjack would call very light refreshment—a beer.

"Here y'are, Saginaw," said Gus Fischer, sliding the order down the bar at him.

Gus had never seen Saginaw before, but calling Saginaw by name didn't surprise either of them; because in the woods country a man's reputation travels fast, especially when he is the youngest drive boss ever to handle the spring log drive down the Au Sable. And, incidentally, when the logs were sorted

and scaled at the end of the drive, the eight timber companies that had worked together made up a five-hundred-dollar purse for Saginaw because he hadn't left a single stick of white pine worth saving stranded when the spring freshet dropped.

Where other men might have felt entitled to announce who they were, Saginaw merely nodded to Gus Fischer and got right down to business.

"Six Counties Lumber Company is summer-cutting between here and Torch River, they told me in West Branch," he remarked. "Is that a fact?"

Gus Fischer did a careful job of wiping up a wet ring on his bar and looked around, to make certain he wouldn't be overheard, before he answered cautiously. "Was. Yep, was summer-cutting." Gus shook his head. "But ain't no more."

Saginaw eased off the pack straps of his turkey and dumped it to the floor at his side. He shrugged his wide shoulders and smiled hopefully.

"Jack Barnes isn't having any trouble with the Fallon crowd, you wouldn't say?"

"Durned right, I wouldn't say!" agreed Gus Fischer. "Think I want my place wrecked for shooting off the wrong end of my mouth?"

Saginaw ordered another beer, and seemed to enjoy it more than his first. That was for several reasons, and one of them being that over in the corner sat a big-shouldered river driver whose shock of red hair seemed to be getting redder every moment as he watched Saginaw drinking beer.

Out of the corner of his eye, Saginaw took in the open hostility with which the red-haired man was regarding him.

"Muskegon Red doesn't seem to like my looks," he grinned at Gus Fischer. "Any chance Muskegon is behind the reason why Jack Barnes isn't cutting?"

Gus Fischer drew back from the bar like a man suddenly aware he is too near a stick of dynamite hooked to a sputtering short fuse.

"You ask the durndest questions, Saginaw," he muttered apologetically. "Now, for gosh sakes, just remember this place ain't built outa boiler plate—"

Just then Muskegon Red kicked back his chair and sauntered over to the bar beside Saginaw.

"Two shots, red and raw," he said to Gus Fischer; then turned to Saginaw: "One's for you, stranger. You're making me sick drinking that lily-juice."

Saginaw pushed back his heavy beer glass as a strong hint he didn't feel the need of it as a weapon as long as his two fists hung from the ends of his arms and shook his head.

"All through for the day, Muskegon," he remarked, smiling.

Muskegon downed his drink without comment. Then he picked up the second glass in his huge fingers and offered it to Saginaw. "Have it down your throat or in the face?"

Something happened right then that caused Gus Fisher to dive under the bar —Saginaw's left hand snaked out and nipped Muskegon Red's wrist. Without spilling a drop of whiskey from the glass, Saginaw removed it from Muskegon's fingers and poured it slowly into a cuspidor.

"Two bits, that costs you, Muskegon," he sighed.

In blank amazement, Muskegon Red stared at the five white weals on his wrist where Saginaw's fingers and thumb had squeezed it. Then a red flush flooded his face.

"Now, Red!" pleaded Gus Fischer, one fearful eye peering above the bar. "Not in here, please now. Outside you got more room, and you can't break nothing."

For once in history as it is written in the woods country Muskegon Red didn't start swinging his pile-driver fists. Instead, he looked Saginaw over from his eight-inch-top riverman's calked

shoes, up his fringed-bottomed thick woolen trousers, to the narrow-brimmed black felt hat perched on the back of a curly blond head.

"You're hired," said Muskegon Red to Saginaw. "Report to camp three, and roll out with daylight in the swamp in the morning."

"Thanks, Red," drawled Saginaw. "But I happen to be doing a little hiring myself. I'm the new woods boss Jack Barnes hired to get out sticks some good friends of yours don't seem to want him to."

"That's what they pay me for," agreed Muskegon Red, taking Saginaw's remark for a sincere compliment. "Furthermore, if you want to see Jack Barnes, you'll have to foot it on into Traverse City. He's in the hospital with a broke leg, so I hear."

"And his daughter, I suppose you sent her to the hospital too?" Saginaw drawled dangerously.

Muskegon Red shrugged scornfully. "Why don't you find out for yourself? Then, if you got any complaints, wander over to camp three and I'll be waiting for you."

Saginaw nodded slowly. "I'll be doing just that, Muskegon."

ALONG about sundown, Saginaw strode into the clearing on the point where Rapid River flows into Torch River. The camp cook was banging an old tire iron with a chunk of wood, calling the crew to supper.

Saginaw halted, waiting to see the mob boil out of the bunk house and race for the cook shack. But nothing like that happened. Instead, a scant handful of grizzled old-timers filed out and walked none too briskly across the clearing.

Saginaw read the bad news—the woods crew of the Six Counties Lumber Company had all but deserted the camp. Only a few swampers and men too old to care what happened had remained. He stopped the last man heading for the cook shack.

"Where will I find Miss Ruth?" he asked.

The old timer jerked a thumb over his shoulder at a small cabin remote from the rest of the camp.

Seeing that was all the information he was going to get, Saginaw walked over and tapped on the screen door.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" a girl asked, coming to the screen door but not opening it.

"I'm Saginaw. Jack Barnes sent for me, ma'm."

"Saginaw— Oh!" Ruth Barnes studied him carefully for a moment.

"Sort of disappointing, I guess I look," drawled Saginaw. "You were expecting a man about nine feet high and two ax handles broad between the eyes, eh?"

Ruth Barnes laughed nervously and brushed a strand of brown hair from her eyes before she unlatched the screen door.

"Yes, something like that! Won't you come in on the porch?" Her eyes became grave again. "I suppose you heard the news—about my father?"

The cool way a girl could bring up a subject like that made Saginaw look twice at her. She stood there with her chin up and her small mouth pressed into a straight line.

"Heard he was in the hospital. Leg broke," said Saginaw. "Figured Muskegon was bragging, but I guess he wasn't."

She thrust at him with a quick glance of suspicion: "You seem on pretty friendly terms with Muskegon Red."

Saginaw shook his head without relaxing his attention, his blue eyes, with a suppressed hint of amusement in them, remaining fixed on hers.

"I said I had hired out to your father," he remarked blandly. "But I don't blame you for looking me over sharp. How bad is the trouble, anyway?"

In short, incisive sentences Ruth Barnes told Saginaw what had happened

in the last few turbulent weeks that had ended in her father being rushed off to the Traverse City hospital. Most of what she told him merely confirmed the lumber camp gossip.

Muskegon Red, Saginaw learned, had been hired as woods boss by Jim Fallon, owner of the Fallon Lumber Company, for the unexpressed though nevertheless special purpose of keeping Jack Barnes from cutting and delivering a mixed order of hardwood saw-mill logs and cordwood to the Traverse Bay Charcoal Iron Company. And it was the cordwood that Jack Barnes was attempting to cut and deliver to the iron furnace during the summer months.

"And there you are," Ruth Barnes was saying to Saginaw, as she finished her story. "Fallon Lumber Company's surveyors claim the surveyor father hired doesn't know his business, and that our loading docks along Torch River are on Fallon Lumber Company's property!"

Saginaw nodded gravely. "Sometimes, ma'm, it's easier to back out and let a bear with a sore paw go ranting past. Ever think about moving the dock over on land you *knew* was yours?"

"That's the trouble!" sighed Ruth Barnes. "Where the dock is now is the only solid ground for a mile up or down stream. It just *has* to be there or we can't get our loads of cordwood to waters edge. It's bottomless swamp everywhere else."

Just then a hoarse whistle echoed from beyond a dense growth of cedars.

"That's the whistle of the *Arcturus,* one of the Iron Company's steamers that has come up to tow away a bargeload of cordwood," Ruth Barnes explained. "Come, we'll go down and talk to the captain."

SAGINAW followed her along a heavily timbered roadway that led across a soft stretch of ground to a huge dock extending a hundred yards along the bank of Torch River. The dock was stripped bare.

As Saginaw approached the dock, he saw a heavy logging chain stretched across the roadway. And guarding it were two grinning lumberjacks leaning on peavie handles.

"It's all right, Saginaw!" one of the guards grinned amiably. "You and Miss Ruth is welcome on Fallon Lumber Company property any time. Just leave your timber to home, is all Muskegon Red asks!"

"Please don't pay any attention," Ruth begged in Saginaw's ear. "Hurry. We mustn't keep the steamer captain waiting."

But instead of meeting the steamer captain when they stepped aboard the *Arcturus,* John Everson, the superintendent of the Iron Company, greeted them. Everson was a short, nervous man over fifty.

"This is serious," he began as soon as Ruth stepped aboard and introduced Saginaw. "I came up here expecting at least two barges would be loaded and ready to haul away. And here not a stick in sight! Listen, I've got to have wood, or I'll have to shut down the blast furnace. And you know what that means, don't you, Miss Barnes?"

Ruth Barnes nodded, discouraged. "Yes, I know. Every day our failure to deliver cordwood ties up production at the blast furnace it will cost Six Counties Lumber Company two hundred per day in penalties." She lifted her eyes to John Everson. "How much of a reserve supply have you on hand?"

"Not over a week's supply!" snapped John Everson. "And I should be building up a bank for winter, right now! That means you should be loading at least three barges a day. And I'm getting nothing!"

"Just keep your shirt on, mister," advised Saginaw, speaking for the first time. "You'll get your cordwood, and plenty of it."

"When?" John Everson shot at him.

Saginaw nodded downstream at the two empty barges moored to the empty loading dock.

"Have your tug back up here at daybreak. Those two barges'll be loaded with wood and ready for you. Better pull out now, because I'm going to be busy as hell."

John Everson squinted up at Saginaw. "Who in the devil are you, anyway? Do you realize you're making a promise that means licking Muskegon Red and his whole woods crew? Huh! I guess you don't."

"I'm Saginaw," replied Saginaw, and let it go at that.

John Everson sighed. "Well, why didn't you say so in the first place?" He nodded encouragingly to Ruth Barnes. "Now you've got somebody who can take care of himself. And Muskegon Red too, I hope!"

SAGINAW walked back to the bunkhouse. It was still daylight. He counted twenty men —twenty, where there should have been forty for the scheme forming in his mind. He began calling them by name:

"You, Jackpine Slim—remember the big drive on the Manistee you brought down for my father, Bay City Mac?"

"Sure do, Saginaw!" exclaimed Jackpine, flattered to have the great feat of his early logging days remembered.

Saginaw nodded and peered into a bunk. "That you, Tamarack? Where's your old sidekick Half Pint, the bow-legged Harp that helped you clean out the Roscommon Bar?"

"Oi'm right here, ye scut!" chirped a cracked voice from the next bunk. An almost bald head peered out, reeking with the fumes of a stub clay pipe under full blast. "Ah' 'tis Bay City Mac's brat, eh? To hell wid you!"

One by one, Saginaw continued digging up long forgotten feats of the grizzled old-timers in the bunkhouse. They laughed and cracked each other on the back and made playful though savage passes at each others' heads as they re-enacted long-forgotten battles.

"—and this is the way I boshed McFeagan's teeth out!" howled Half Pint, swinging a savage blow for Saginaw's jaw.

"Quiet, you river boomers!" Saginaw yelled as he ducked Half Pint's swing. He pulled Tamarack loose from Jackpine and motioned again for attention. "Those young punks over at camp three think you old-timers can't fight. They say you're too old."

"Ye're a liar by the clock, Saginaw!" roared Half Pint. "Stond still and I'll put my boots to your sissified face—"

"So they've left only four men to guard the dock," continued Saginaw, shoving Half Pint back out of danger. "Think of it—four men keeping twenty tough old pine knots from doing a little job like loading two barges with cordwood! Well, that's a story you never heard in the old days along the boardwalk of Saginaw town."

"And they never will!" screamed Half Pint, shaking his fist under Tamarack's nose. "And Oi'm warning ye, ye scrawny bite for a blind crow—lay off that six-foot logger with the gold tooth down by the dock. That yannigan's my meat, I'll have ye know!"

As Saginaw hoped, once he got these old-timers aroused there was no holding them back.

Some limping, some with an unaccustomed glitter in eyes that had grown a little dim, they fell en masse upon Muskegon Red's dock guards and had them bound and gagged before a respectable return blow was struck.

Through the night, the teams snorted and pawed as the huge loads of cordwood rumbled over the plank causeway to the loading dock. It was like dull thunder as the heavy billets cascaded down the chutes into the two barges.

Then, just at dawn, the hoarse whistle of the *Arcturus* bellowed around the bend.

"Take 'em away!" Saginaw called out to the steamer's captain.

The steamer's crew made fast their tow lines and the barges swung clear. Saginaw followed his crew of old-timers back up the road toward the cook shack.

"Why, what has happened?" Ruth Barnes, standing in the doorway of her cabin, looked first at the struggling line of men pushing for first place at the cook house door and then back to Saginaw. "You mean— You really loaded those barges with just those old men?"

"I'd hardly call 'em *old* men," objected Saginaw, mildly.

Ruth Barnes sighed and shook her head. "You can do that once, perhaps. But tonight it will be another story. Muskegon Red will have thirty men on guard."

Saginaw looked down at his bruised knuckles and smiled dryly. "Then there's going to be the wildest fight this Rapid River country ever saw, ma'm."

"I forbid it!" exclaimed Ruth Barnes. "Violence always ends in some one getting maimed for life—or killed."

"I'll go right over to camp three and tell Muskegon Red he's got to stop playing rough," promised Saginaw with a twisted smile. He was all seriousness again when he looked down at Ruth Barnes. "It's a shame you have to be in the middle of a mess like this. Hadn't you better leave camp—go off and visit some with your father while I sort of argue this out with Muskegon Red?"

"I can't!" Ruth Barnes sighed. "Mr. Chadwick—father's lawyer—is coming. Today or tomorrow, I don't know which."

Saginaw turned his head and nodded toward an approaching livery rig which was then emerging from the narrow gash in the thick timber that marked the woods trail to Rapid City.

"Looks like your Mr. Whereas and Wherefore now," he said. "I'll wait."

Mr. Chadwick turned out to be no dry as dust law man. He was lean, gray-eyed, in his late fifties. He acknowledged Ruth's introduction of Saginaw with a tight-lipped smile.

"Now, Ruth," he said, giving her arm a fatherly pat, "I want you to go back to the house and relax while I talk over the situation with Saginaw. Later, I'll come and report just what plans we make."

Then he and Saginaw walked down to the loading dock, where four of Saginaw's old-timers were patrolling the dock.

"Um—!" was Mr. Chadwick's first comment, when Saginaw told him of the fight and the loading of the barges the night before. "Possession carries a lot of weight in matters of law. But the question is—can you maintain possession?"

Saginaw shook his head. "I wouldn't ask these relics to put up a pitched battle against Muskegon Red's whole crew. I'm just bluffing right now."

Mr. Chadwick nodded. "I've been trying for two weeks to get an injunction against Fallon Lumber Company and its agents, to prevent them from interfering with Jack Barnes. Court adjourned yesterday and Judge Mills has gone fishing without leaving any address. You know what that means, don't you, Saginaw?"

"Seen it happen so many times, I could sing it," replied Saginaw. "The big lumber outfit stops production for the little fellow and breaks him before he can get justice. That what happened to my own father, Bay City Mac. I guess you remember."

Mr. Chadwick nodded sympathetically. "I knew Mac very well, Saginaw. He was one of my closest personal friends."

Saginaw's jaw was hard as he swung a level stare at the lawyer. "This same company smashed him, Mr. Chadwick. But he's the last little operator they're going to pull that dirty stuff on!"

"I'm afraid you're letting sentiment cloud your judgment," was Mr. Chadwick's dubious comment.

AFTER the lawyer had driven away, the daughter of Jack Barnes came down to the loading dock and called Saginaw to one side.

"It's hopeless, Saginaw," she said, biting her lips. "I—I want you to withdraw our men before Muskegon Red arrives. I don't want any more violence. I forbid it!"

Saginaw nodded glumly. He turned to the four old timers and waved his arm toward camp. "Clear out, boys. Thanks for what you've done so far—"

"Clear out, hell!" snarled Half Pint, thumping his peavie handle on the dock. "Oi've set up all night, waiting to bounce this off Muskegon Red's skull!"

But a curt jerk of Saginaw's thumb sent the four away. Then Saginaw stepped over onto the dock and sat down.

Ruth Barnes studied him apprehensively. "Aren't you coming back too?"

"Not until I've had a little talk with Muskegon Red," replied Saginaw grimly.

Ruth Barnes stamped her foot emphatically. "I forbid it! You shan't—"

"Miss Barnes," said Saginaw in a slow drawl, "when I don't like the orders my boss hands out, I quit!"

"You mean—?" Ruth Barnes stared hard at Saginaw. "You haven't quit! You're fired!"

"Have it your way," drawled Saginaw. "And I think you'd better be moving along. Here comes Muskegon Red and his woods crew."

Muskegon Red, leading thirty of his huskiest lumberjacks, marched down to the edge of the dock.

"All trespassers off the dock!" he ordered gruffly.

Ruth Barnes threw him a scornful look. "I'm warning you for the last time, Muskegon, that you are illegally interfering with the rights of the Six Counties Lumber Company!"

"Ma'm, I ain't no lawyer," replied Muskegon Red bluntly. "I got my orders. And what I'm paid for, I generally do."

"Very well, then," said Ruth Barnes, turning away. "You can tell your boss that I have just this day instructed my father's lawyer to file suit against Fallon Lumber Company for a million dollars damages!"

Muskegon Red grinned as he watched Ruth Barnes walk off the dock and up the timbered causeway toward her own camp. But the grin faded when he turned again, to see Saginaw still standing on the dock.

"Get off, Saginaw!" he said harshly. "You heard your boss, didn't you?"

Saginaw gave him stare for stare.

"Not my boss, Muskegon," he drawled. "I'm not working for anybody but myself. And seeing this nice, valuable dock nobody seems to own, I'm claiming squatter's rights on it!"

A rumble, half growl and half laughter, rippled through Muskegon Red's woods crew. They had come expecting a savage battle with a force almost as large as their own, and then to see one man defying thirty suddenly became hugely amusing.

Muskegon Red silenced them with a curt wave of his arm. He turned, walking menacingly toward Saginaw.

"Better call up your whole woods crew, Muskegon," grinned Saginaw, starting to unbutton his timber cruiser's shirt. "This is going to be too much of a fight for a little man like you."

That brought a howl of laughter from Muskegon Red's crew.

Muskegon turned on his heel, flushed with anger.

"Shut up!" he snarled. "And stand clear." Slowly he turned to Saginaw and started unbuttoning his own shirt. "I don't need any help handling you!"

Saginaw smiled as he flung his shirt aside and stood there, bare to the waist,

lean muscles rippling under his skin. So far his plan was working out. He counted strongly on the deep sense of fair play of the average lumberjack, who liked nothing better than to sit and watch a battle royal between two such evenly matched men as himself and Muskegon Red.

True, Muskegon was the heavier by at least thirty pounds. On the other hand, Saginaw had speed and tireless endurance in his favor.

"Put your mark on his pretty face with your calks, Muskegon!" yelled one of the Fallon woods crew.

Muskegon Red moved closer to Saginaw, feinting for an opening.

Suddenly Saginaw's left fist shot out in a teasing blow that landed flush on Muskegon's unsmiling lips. It was answered by a whistling right which slashed harmlessly over Saginaw's quickly ducked head.

Under foot, the sharp calks scuffed and tore splinters from the thick dock timbers. Then, with a sideward twist, Muskegon's right heel shot for Saginaw's thigh, in a driving blow that carried force enough to shatter bone.

But Saginaw side-stepped and crashed his right into the bulging cords of Muskegon's neck. Without showing the slightest distress, Muskegon took a second whirlwind smash on the jaw as he lunged forward and gripped Saginaw in his enormous arms. Twice his knee jerked upward in disabling thrusts at Saginaw's groin.

"Not this time!" grunted Saginaw, squirming sideways in Muskegon's grasp and presenting his hip to the blows.

Muskegon's only reply was to sink his hard chin deep into Saginaw's shoulder and tighten his crushing grip. Slowly, he bent Saginaw backward.

"You got him, Red!" yelled one of the lumberjacks. "Put the calks to him!"

With sparks dancing before his eyes, Saginaw suddenly pitched over backward, dragging Muskegon over on top of him. Then, before Muskegon could relax his tensed grip, Saginaw thrust upward with both his spiked shoes.

There was a sickening rip of heavy wool cloth; Muskegon hurtled over Saginaw and landed with a heavy thump on the dock. He was on his feet before Saginaw could roll over. High into the air leaped Muskegon, aiming his heavy spiked shoes for Saginaw's defenseless body.

On one knee, Saginaw had no time to dodge. All he could do was drive upward with both hands and grasp Muskegon by the ankles.

Flipping over on his back, Saginaw whipped Muskegon's feet from under him. Muskegon flung out his arms, whirling them in a vain attempt to maintain his balance as he crashed full length across the edge of the dock.

Lying flat on his stomach, the cords in his wrists straining to the cracking point, Saginaw barked over his shoulder: "Shake a leg, some of you! I can't hold him much longer from slipping into the water!"

Powerful hands heaved Muskegon Red back up on the dock. Saginaw rose stiffly to his feet, his right ankle burning as though a red hot iron was jammed inside his shoe.

He swayed uncertainly while he wiped from his lips a smear of blood.

"Who's the next man?" he challenged.

MUSKEGON RED'S men looked down at their fallen leader, then inquiringly at each other. The crowd split apart, and a bull-throated river driver stomped out into the circle.

"I'm Pine River Ed," he announced, stripping off his shirt. He tossed it scornfully into a lumberjack's face and spat on his hard palms. "All I'm sorry about," he said with a wave to the Fallon woods crew, "is that there ain't two of you, Saginaw. Stand back, boys. I'm going to need room when I start taking this Saginaw man apart!"

Saginaw, with most of his weight on his left foot, pivoted warily as Pine River Ed circled him with his heavy chin outthrust.

"Yuh nailed to that plank?" Pine River jeered at him.

But he made the mistake of getting too close to Saginaw's cocked left fist. Pine River's head snapped back from a blow he hadn't seen coming.

The crowd laughed and nudged each other.

"Tie into him, Pine River!" somebody jeered. "Can't you see Saginaw's only got one laig?"

Panther-like, Pine River followed that advice, feinting savagely in an attempt to draw Saginaw's weight to his sprained ankle.

But his move produced an unexpected result; for Saginaw, teeth clinched against the searing pain, planted his right heel firmly and hurled his right fist flush on Pine River's mouth.

He didn't stop—coming in again with left and right smashes that rocked the shaggy head before his fast-blurring eyes.

One last blow sent Pine River staggering back. But Saginaw couldn't follow. He stood there reeling, trying to force his eyes to stay in focus.

Saginaw knew he couldn't last but for a few more seconds. He pawed blindly for Pine River, hoping to close his hands on him. . . . Then from nowhere came a terrific blow of Pine River's fist. Saginaw heard a mocking laugh and felt the nerve-shattering explosion of another blow against his jaw.

"Watch me measure him, boys!" he heard Pine River call out. Somewhere out in front of him he still could see the vague outline of a bobbing head.

Then everything he had left went into a final wild swing. It landed on human flesh, and in a frenzy of pain his hands closed on Pine River's powerful body. Disregarding the blows being rained on his head and shoulders, Saginaw spent his last ounce of energy in a final heave that hurled Pine River over his shoulder.

He whirled, groping blindly. But Pine River lay huddled on the dock.

Saginaw wiped the blood from his eyes and turned his face toward the dark blur that must be the rest of the Fallon Lumber Company woods crew.

"Who's next?" he croaked.

"Yeah, who's next?" growled a deep voice not far off. "Can't you see he hardly can stand on his feet?"

Through a thick fog, that was slowly beginning to clear a bit, Saginaw saw a third man push his way through the crowd.

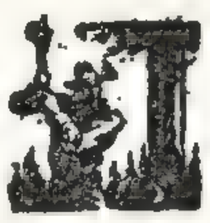
"That's the stuff, Canthook!" approved the same deep voice ringing with sarcasm. "Step right out and take Saginaw apart. But, damn your eyes, remember this: When my broke leg is good again, Canthook, you'll fight me. Me—Muskegon Red!"

Saginaw shook his head to clear his brain. Gradually his eyes cleared and he could see Muskegon Red with his back propped against a dock piling and his big bruised hands supporting his broken leg.

"And that goes for you too, Saginaw!" Muskegon Red growled up at him. "I can whip any logger alive; I'm going to keep tangling with you till I've licked the living daylights outa you and put my heel-mark on your face!"

"I won't be far off when you come looking for me, Muskegon," said Saginaw. He turned slowly and jerked out an order at the Fallon Lumber Company woods crew: "Pick up your two men and clear out.

"You're top dog, Saginaw!" grinned back one of them. "Anything you say goes, I guess."



RESTING his weight on his good ankle, Saginaw leaned back against a dock piling and watched the Fallon woods crew carry off Muskegon and Pine River Ed. Then, when the last man had straggled up the trail and was lost in the blue green

fringe of cedars, he started limping painfully across the timbered causeway toward the Six Counties Lumber Company camp.

At the door of the small cabin, he stopped and rapped on the screen.

Ruth Barnes answered his knock.

"What's happened?" she gasped.

"You can turn out the men and start loading the barges, ma'm," drawled Saginaw thickly. He started to turn away but his knees buckled and he slumped to the ground.

Ruth Barnes caught his head in her arms and lifted it to her lap.

"Half Pint!" she called out. "Hitch up the light team. I must get him to the hospital."

Half Pint stumped over and peered down at Saginaw's battered head.

"Divvil a hand Oi'll raise to carry him off to any hospital!" snorted Half Pint.

"*Please,*" begged Ruth Barnes. "He's terribly hurt—"

"Jolted and jarred is all," growled Half Pint. "Anyways, d'ye think Oi'm the kind to deprive a young lad of them beautiful tears ye're sheddin' all over his face? Go on, lass. Give him a smacking good kiss and he'll be back to life in a wink! Go on—"

Faintly, one of Saginaw's eyelids flickered. He lifted his head and rolled over on one elbow. One eye fastened itself grimly on Half Pint.

"Clear out, Half Pint!" he growled thickly. "And if I ever catch you telling a word of this—"

"What did I tell ye?" Half Pint chuckled as he backed out of range.

Flushed, Saginaw rose to his feet. He mumbled an awkward apology to Ruth Barnes, turned toward the cookhouse and waved a commanding arm.

"Roll out, you old hard pine knots, and load the barges!"

Saginaw's order was answered by a wild yell of triumph as the old-timers of the Six Counties lumber camp boiled out and raced for the dock.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

"SIX feet and horse-faced"—that's Skyline Jackson, hero of Caddo Cameron's Western novelette of the same name. It's a story you'll remember, with a new Western character you can't forget.

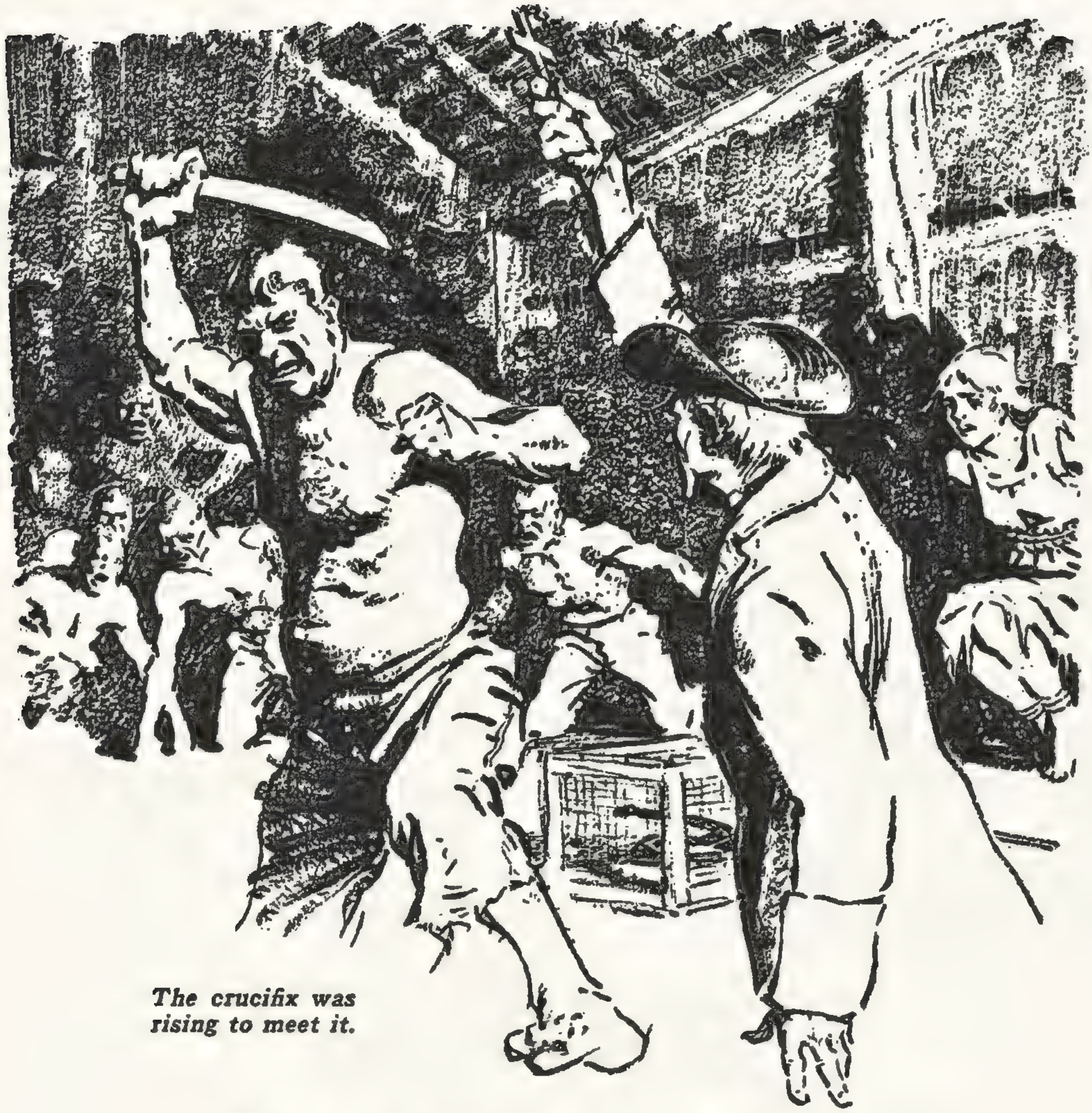
and in the same issue—

Albert R. Wetjen brings us a new sea character, Fortunus Bulkhead Bean, and a good sea story, "Fortunes of War," about a man who was a sinker of ships, a dealer in double deals, and withal as chuckle-provoking a ruffian as ever scuttled a ship. H. Bedford-Jones' "Paid in Full, One Pigtail" follows the sea-trail of Decatur against the sea raiders of Tripoli; and Gordon MacCreagh, in "The Lions That Stopped a Railroad," brings to light a little known incident of deep Africa.

THESE, with Gordon Young's "The Redhead from Tulluco," other good stories and the usual features and special departments, will make up the next issue of

Adventure 15c

The March issue will be on sale at all stands on February 10th



The crucifix was rising to meet it.

BAYOU BOOTY

By MEIGS O. FROST

FROM the pilot house of the *Heloise*, rumbling her placid way down Bayou Dauterive, the slim pirogue that shot out of a nameless little waterway into the main channel was like a toy canoe driven by a toy paddler. But the keen eyes of Ol' Man Cap'n Didier, focussed only a moment on their distant target before his gray head nodded in recognition.

"Ol' Bink Benton, *mon pere*," he said to Father Girault, who was standing beside him. "Look how he's standin' up, wavin' his paddle at us like he wants us to show some speed."

Father Girault set down the thick white ironstone coffee cup from which he had been sipping. He picked up a pair of gangrened old binoculars and peered ahead.

Old Bink Benton certainly was acting like a crazy man, it seemed to him. He didn't like Bink any too well, anyway. The leathery old trapper was one of the

unregenerate deep swamp souls, and his occasional carousings were a thorn in the side of Father Girault, for they always were accompanied by broad jests at the little priest's expense. But something very urgent now very evidently was on the trapper's mind. He stood in that slim pirogue, with its scant inch or two of freeboard, waved his paddle at the *Heloise* in wild beckoning gestures, and then, kneeling, began to paddle furiously toward them. That much the binoculars made quite clear. But Ol' Man Cap'n didn't need either the glasses or an explanation.

"He's afraid I was goin' to take the cut-off and he'd have to chase us," he explained to Father Girault. "He sho' has got somethin' mighty heavy on his mind."

His gnarled, dark old hand reached for the whistle-cord. Down the bayou bellowed the *Heloise's* wheezy old whistle, to let Bink know his signals had been seen and recognized. Then he leaned forward and blew a resounding blast through a battered old speaking-tube that led below.

"Hi, Snake-hips," he called to the huge Negro who was engineer and fireman combined, "slow her down. We don't want to sink ol' Bink with the wave-wash."

It was only a matter of minutes before the pirogue shot alongside. Deftly old Bink Benton, tie-line in hand, balanced himself in the cranky little dugout, leaped aboard the low guards of the *Heloise,* and hauled his light little craft up after him.

"H'lo, Didier. Howdy, *Padre.*" The old trapper, all rawhide and wire, seemed scarcely winded by his racing dash. "Sho' glad I spotted your smoke early. Hadn't been for that little bayou I took for a short cut, you'd been down the cut-off an' long gone befo' I hit Bayou Dauterive. Good thing that pirogue of mine'll navigate in a heavy dew, or I'd been laid up on a mud-bank two miles back."

Hawg-head arrived with the coffee.

"Heah y'are, Mist' Bink," he said. "Blacker'n sin, hotter'n hell, an' stronger'n 'ligion, beggin' th' *Padre's* pardon."

Father Girault chuckled as Bink drank deeply and gustily. Hawg-head's coffee was famous as the *Heloise* up and down the long miles of Louisiana's coastal deep swamp.

"Sho' good," sighed Bink, as he drained the cup. "Reckon yo' could manage another, Hawg-head?"

"Comin' right up, Mist' Bink."

"NOW you got your breath back, Bink," said Ol' Man Cap'n, "reckon you could tell us why you are puttin' on this one-man pirogue race?"

"Sure can," the old trapper began. "An' it's bad business. Looks lak we gotta be th' Law, whether we wanta or not."

"What yo' mean?" Ol' Man Cap'n's voice was slow and drawling, gentle as always, but his washed-out old eyes were alert.

"Big Maurepas done broke outa Angola an' made himself a clean getaway," said Bink.

"So-o," said Ol' Man Cap'n. Father Girault watched intently but said nothing.

"Well," said Bink Benton. "Reckon you two done hear sometime or other how th' word went around what he planned to do to li'l Armaid Perrin an' that Rene Denis boy she's aimin' to marry, come time he does get out?"

"I done heard," said Cap'n Didier. "Yo' too, *mon pere?*"

"Yes," said the wiry little priest soberly. "I heard."

"Well," said Bink, "he's out."

"What's th' high sheriff doin'?" asked Cap'n Didier.

"Laid up in th' hospital in N'Awlyins, gettin' his appendix cut out," said Bink. "Took him theah two days ago. That chief deputy o' his is afraid to wiggle a fingeh, savin' after somebody done some-

thin'; and he says he don' believe Big Maurepas 'u'd come back to th' deep swamp anyway. Trouble is, after that big boy's done anything at all to Armaid an' that boy o' hers, it'll be too late."

"Bink, how come yo' know all this?" inquired Cap'n Didier mildly.

"Paddlin' oveh *Cheniere* Lafitte way this mawnin'," said Bink. Pierre Roquin's got himself a shack theah. One o' Big Maurepas' gang, he is. I dropped in for some coffee, and I found Pierre drunk an' uglier'n hell. Braggin' drunk, lak they get sometimes. Starts tellin' me how Big Maurepas, he's bigger'n any law we got down heah in th' deep swamp. I tell him it don't look lak that to me, with Big Maurepas wearin' convict clothes at Angola. Then he let's th' whole thing out. Seems lak Big Mauerpas, he had some way of gettin' word outa Angola to some of his ol' gang, and he promises 'em he'll be out fo' tonight, and then they gets word he is out. City fisherman in one of them fast speed boats, he seen it in th' papers."

"Why did he promise them he would be out tonight, especially?" asked Father Girault.

"Don' you know what night t'night is?" There was surprise in the old trapper's voice.

"June the 23rd, I think," said the priest, frowning.

"Don' that mean nothin' else to yo'?"

"What else should it mean, Bink?"

"St. John's Eve," said Bink shortly. Voodoo night!"

"Great Gawd A'mighty!" Ol' Man Cap'n exploded.

"Bink Benton!" The little priest's voice was stern and resonant. "You don't mean to tell me they still keep up those unholy rites?"

"Call 'em what yo' want, *Padre*," came from the trapper. "They sho' keep 'em up. Else why do I have to get away from Pierre Roquin when I tell him I'm goin' to take a hand?"

"He detained you?"

"He tried." There was a grim note in the old trapper's voice.

"How?"

"With a gun."

"How did you get away?"

"Reckon he fo'got I had this."

Bink Benton's face set like a leather mask as his right hand flashed to the throat of his partly-buttoned shirt. There was a twitch of strong fingers at a leather thong that hung concealed about his neck inside.

A keen straight blade glittered in the sun.

"You mean—" Father Girault began.

"Sho' do, *Padre*. Pierre's still on Cheniere Lafitte and I ain't. And Pierre, he ain't goin' away from theah no mo'."

"God forgive you—" breathed the priest.

"I'll take my chances on that," Bink interrupted him. Then, sharply: "Listen, we're losin' time."

"JUST what you figger we better do, Bink?" asked Ol' Man Cap'n.

It was as though the old trapper had taken command of a complex army, was giving plans of battle to his staff.

"Up to us three old men," he said. "High sheriff's outa it. Chief deputy's outa it. Young Rene Denis, he's outa it too, even if it is his girl. He's shrimp-trawlin' in his lugger down off Grande Terre. Heah's what I figger, minute I spot yo'-all. First time in my life I was glad t' see a mission-boat—"

He grinned at Father Girault for a moment, but no smile answered him.

"Didier," he went on, "you head for Bayou Placide shrimp platform in th' *Heloise*. Big Octave, he's got plenty men theah. Get 'em aboard with all the guns they got, and head for Mauvais Bois. That's wheah Big Maurepas an' his gang's got what they calls their voodoo temple. Reckon I'm only one outside that gang knows 'bout it. I stumbled into it paddlin' past late St.

John's Eve last year, but I keep my mouth shut.

"If'n the *Padre* thinks I won't pollute his mission-boat, him and me, we'll head fo' Cheniere Lacroix on Bayou Congo, where li'l Armaid Perrin an' her mama lives. The Padre's *St. Rita,* she draws less water than the *Heloise.* I can pilot him short cuts yo' couldn't take, Didier. Then, if we find Big Maurepas has grabbed li'l Armaid, we'll head for Mauvais Bois, too. Because that's wheah he'll take her if he grabs her, sho' as hell, and not beggin' the *Padre's* pardon, neitheh. An' what'll happen to that gal if he gets her theah won't be pretty to remember, neitheh."

"I shall be glad to have you aboard the *St. Rita,* Bink, even if your hands are stained with the blood of your fellow man," said the little priest, soberly.

"Ain't stained so's anybody can notice it *Padre,*" Bink grinned. "I washed 'em right careful after I finished workin' on Pierre Roquin."

Father Girault shook his head.

"We are losing time, as you said," was all he answered. "I'll have your pirogue put aboard the *St. Rita* and we'll start now." There was a faint flush of excitement in his cheeks.

"*Au revoir,* Didier," he said. "It was the Providence of God I saw your smoke and came aboard for that cup of coffee."

Bink Benton had got as far as the pilot house door, but now he turned.

"While you're makin' up book-keepin' on the Providence of God, *Padre,*" he said dryly, "yo' oughta credit Him with somethin' for jigglin' Pierre Roquin's hand so's he missed his first shot, and for speedin' up mine so I made him miss his second. Come on. We got no time for pretty talkin'. If'n a State penitentiary ain't stoppin' Big Maurepas, a sermon ain't goin' to be much help."

Down the pilot house steps he sped, grabbed his pirogue off the deck of the *Heloise,* and stepped aboard the *St. Rita.*

"Eenyas," he said to Ignace, Father Girault's engineer, cook, man-of-all work, "If I find yo' monkeyin' with what's in this pirogue, yo'll think yo' done tangle with a sting ray crossed with a buzz-saw."

Ignace grinned. They knew each other of old. He shouted to Snake-hips and Hawg-head to cast off the mooring ropes, and went below to start his motor. Father Girault took the steering wheel. The two strange craft parted company.

"Head her up-bayou about five miles, *Padre,*" called Bink. "They's a short-cut there that'll ease us about fifteen miles. An' yo' better be prayin' yo' pet Providence that this Navy of th' Lawd's got gasoline enough to push her hard, 'cause we'll be scrapin' mud plenty."

The bronchial old whistle of the *Heloise* husked a final blast of farewell.

THREE old men, as Bink Benton had said. And it was up to them. Few parts of the world held three stranger old men than they, but they had come to be accepted in a land where the unique was the commonplace.

Strangest figure of all, probably, to eyes alien to that strange land of the Louisiana coastal deep swamps was Father Girault Duchassois, and his mission-boat, the *St. Rita.* He had named her that because in the hierarchy of the saints of his Church she is the "saint of the impossible," the saint for whose intercession the devout pray in causes hopeless and lost. His ambition to have a mission boat to serve his wide and watery parish had seemed a hopeless, lost cause to him after many disappointments until a new archbishop in New Orleans, listening to his plea, had granted him the funds. Thus he bought and had remodelled to his peculiar needs the stubby, staunch little forty-foot gasoline cruiser that emerged from the shipyard with *St. Rita* painted bravely in sharp black letters on the battleship gray of her stern.

Old Bink Benton was acting like a crazy man . . .

In her cabin was a little portable altar and a tiny organ. They had set them up on many a wave-washed cheniere, on many a shell bank and sandy island where fishermen, trappers, turtle hunters, oystermen, shrimpers, moss-gatherers, still clung to their primitive bayou freedom, the cities a distant dream.

In the cabin, too, was a built-in confessional where for years now they had poured out their simple sins into the ears of the priest. His shotgun and his fishing rod and reel hung across from it, for he was a mighty hunter and fisherman in his moments of leisure. And his people loved to lead him to choice and secret places where the fish bit always, and where deer could be driven past clusters of thick undergrowth in which the hunter waited. They loved to hear him tell them tales of St. Hubert, patron of hunters, of those other fishermen who followed their Master on a lake called Galilee.

There was no mistaking the *St. Rita* when she chugged into sight. For on her bow rose the strange device for a boat, the double-barred cross that paid daily honor to the Archbishop of New Orleans whose gift had made her possible. Father Girault had even made that cross the subject of a sermon in which he had said: "It is a holy symbol, my children, but it is also a lesson. For like sin, it looks more attractive than is that of which it is composed. It is discarded gas-pipe I fashioned in this form with my own hands, and the can of household gilt that made it shining gold cost me ten cents!"

They chuckled at that and remembered it, like the equally-shining little brass saluting cannon on the foredeck. Father Girault had bought that very cheaply of a junk dealer who had it off a dismantled yacht of the Southern Yacht Club, at New Orleans. It gave a magnificent salute in the hands of Ignace as the *St. Rita* neared a settlement. And men told gleefully how Father Girault on the first time he had chugged up the Mississippi River in the *St. Rita,* had paused in front of the old St. Louis Cathedral on Jackson Square, New Orleans, the altar that was oldest in that archdiocese, and had fired a salute of twenty-two guns to his archbishop; one more gun than the salute of the President of the United States. And how, when the archbishop reproved him, he had answered simply: "Your Grace's pardon, but I thought it fitting from the Church Militant."

IN HIS way, Cap'n Didier Dantin and his *Heloise* were figures equally strange and equally familiar through the deep swamp. Rawhide-lean, tanned to mahogany through his years in the Louisiana sun, he drove his splintery old flap-paddle stern-wheeler through a maze of winding waterways that would have dizzied navigators accustomed to deep water. His schedule to the deep-swamp settlements was "all the time, every now and then." His ancient craft snorted and coughed her way down into that watery wilderness from the west bank of the Mississippi River, bearing freight and passengers to remote bayou settlements reachable only by water. Daily on those voyages Ol' Man Cap'n Didier met folk civilization rarely sees. And he knew them all.

Swarthy pirogue men paused in their paddling to wave and shout greeting to him. Women in calico wrappers, lank or billowing with fat, barefooted often, beckoned and called to him from sagging little boat-landings. And always he came chunking and clanking up alongside at their hail, and took their commissions and ran their errands for them "up front," as the swamp folk called the west bank of the Mississippi. Bare-legged, sun-blackened children hailed him with the shrill bayou greeting: *"Eh, la bas,* Ol' Man Cap'n!" and he roared back from his pilot house, or waved, or set them delirious with delight as he saluted them with that wheezy whistle. And his black crew, Snake-hips and Hawg-head, lorded it superbly over the other deep-swamp blacks. When he was pleased with them he called 'em "steamboatin' fools" and they let the world know it.

And Bink Benton was something more than just one more deep swamp trapper. Quiet and friendly at times, a skilled trapper and pirogue paddler, he was also a very deadly shot and a knife-fighter when once a brawl started. Men didn't tread on Bink Benton, or if they tried to, mourned for it.

THREE old men. They had seen little Armaid Perrin of Cheniere Lacroix grow up. They had seen the dawning of young romance between her and young Rene Denis. They had seen that son of a shiftless father, disgusted with the ways of his people, tauten and straighten, and become one of the finest youngsters of the coast. He had worked with almost inhuman energy. He had saved like a miser. He had won respect. Now he owned his own trawling lugger. More than that, he owned a little farm on from Bayou Congo. There was only a rough one-room cabin there now. But all men knew that at the end of this coming trapping season, when he had marketed his catch, he planned to build the house to which he would take Armaid as a bride. And the decent folk of the deep swamp felt warm and fine about it. They were a fine looking pair.

Tragedy had come into their lives al-

ready, leaving Armaid Perrin fatherless. At a bayou ball, Big Maurepas had laid eyes on the girl for the first time. Armaid was in her new "party dress" of white, red ribbons woven in her dark hair, a red ribbon as a sash about her slim waist, her dancing feet in little white pumps.

"Me for her, an' her for me," Big Maurepas grinned at one of his companions. And his pursuit of the girl started. He frightened her. Well he might, for the man seemed wholly evil. There were strange tales in the deep swamp of deviltries by Big Maurepas and the men, white and black and of mixed blood, who gathered about him at his call. There were memories of missing men, unexplained. There were thefts of bales of furs from the back rooms of bayou storekeepers. There were rumors of liquor smuggled up from Cuba and Mexico and Central America, slipped up the winding bayous to New Orleans and sold to men to whom the freedom from customs duties and internal revenue taxes was alluring. And, weaving in and out of the whole fabric of the legends of evil gathering about Big Maurepas, like a thread of mingled black and scarlet, were those whispers of voodoo orgies in some secret place in the deep swamp.

Louis Perrin, father of Armaid, had heard these stories. That first time following the dance where Big Maurepas had seen the girl, when he came to the house on Cheniere Lacroix, Louis Perrin had met him at the door and had forbidden him to come there again.

White-faced, cold with fear, Armaid Perrin had stood near her father while he faced the deep swamp man. There was courage in Louis Perrin.

"There will be no fight between us, Maurepas," Louis Perrin had said. "I seek no trouble with you, and I want none. But my daughter wants none of you, nor do I. Now I tell you, never come to this house again. Never molest my daughter again. For if you do, I promise that I will shoot you down as I would shoot a congo I found crawling in this door."

In the argot of the deep swamp, a "congo" is the name of the cotton-mouth moccasin, that bloated and deadly snake that crawls on land or swims the bayous at will.

The swarthy face of Big Maurepas grew almost black with wrath. His great shoulders tensed. Then, as Louis Perrin reached for the shotgun leaning against the wall, his forward step paused and he shrugged. He laughed sardonically and swung away.

Two weeks later Louis Perrin was dead, killed in a knife-fight with Big Maurepas in the tiny one-room shack on his muskrat trap-line, far from his home. And big Maurepas would have vanished in the deep swamp then but for the chance that two deputy sheriffs were cruising past. They heard the scream of Louis Perrin as the knife drove home, entered, and covered Big Maurepas with pump-guns before he could get away.

Then followed the trial at the courthouse "up front," where the slayer pleaded self-defence, and there was a knife with the initials "L. P." carved on the haft that Armaid Perrin and her mother had never seen before in their lives, though they knew every tiniest possession of Louis Perrin.

On the witness stand, the prisoner glowering at them, they told simply of the warning Louis Perrin had given Big Maurepas in the French of the bayous that time he called to see Armaid. It was murder, and the men of the deep swamp knew it. But Big Maurepas had hired a city lawyer, and the man was skilled with juries, and in the end Big Maurepas was found guilty of manslaughter and sent to the Louisiana state penitentiary farm at Angola.

There he had become a "trusty," and it is easy for trusties on that great and sprawling plantation to send messages where they will if they have the means.

Now he had escaped. And ahead of him had breathed the threat of what would happen to those who had dared to testify against him. Above all, to Armaid Perrin.

St. John's Eve clamping down on the deep swamp with the sunset just ahead. Voodoo drums sounding somewhere in the tangled primeval wilderness. Black men and men of mixed blood and white men more depraved than both, rallying to the summons of their old leader. And the high sheriff prone in a hospital. Rene Denis far out beyond Grande Terre with his lugger, trawling for shrimp. Pierre Roquin, who might have been forced to guide a rescue party to the depths of Mauvais Bois if necessary, dead on Cheniere Lafitte, from Bink Benton's knife in his throat. Hours passing, slowly but inexorably, until nightfall.

Yes, as Bink Benton had told Father Girault and Ol' Man Cap'n Didier, it was up to three old men—up to them cold.

SULTRY and steaming, the jungle heat was enveloping the *St. Rita* like a blanket freshly dipped in very hot water. They were in the lower reaches of Bayou Congo, now headed for Cheniere Lacroix, that little settlement that drew its name from a giant dead liveoak, the trunk and remaining branches of which formed a rough and rugged cross men could see looming against the sky.

Down below, Ignace nursed his motor. Grim-faced, Father Girault stood at the little steering wheel. Obediently the stout little craft swerved clear from hull-cracking, threatening cypress knees; rounded twisting bends and straightened out in long, clear reaches where the thick jungle growth came down to the bank like a solid wall. But her progress seemed all too slow to the impatient little priest.

"This the best speed you can get out of her, Eenyas?" he called down the companionway.

"She's sing lak angel and she's work lak horse, *mon pere,*" Ignace called back. "W'at yo' want her do? Fly lak bird?"

Bink Benton was saying nothing. He was squatted beside his pirogue, as it lay on the cabin roof, and was cleaning and oiling a long, blue-steel weapon that was his treasure. It was a British-made B. S. A. air-rifle with a heavy steel barrel and smooth brown walnut stock, gift to Bink from a Northern ornithologist he had guided through the deep swamp. It was silent, and it could drive its little bullets through a pine plank. His face was like a war-mask set in terrifying lines as he worked.

It jangled the over-wrought nerves of the priest.

"Are your thoughts always of killing?" he demanded, suddenly and bitterly.

Bink Benton was neither sudden nor bitter, but there was steel beneath the easy drawl of his voice.

"You stick to prayer, *Padre,*" he said. "If'n we find what I'm fearin', I'm trustin' to somethin' Big Maurepas'll understand—the talk of a gun."

But before he could answer, Father Girault's heart leaped. The *St. Rita* had just swung around a hairpin bend in the bayou. There ahead lay a long open reach, bright with the westering sun. There on the right-hand bank, huddled the little homes of Cheniere Lacroix. In one of them, Father Girault was praying, little Armaid Perrin and her widowed mother yet were safe.

STEADILY the *St. Rita* forged down that reach of Bayou Congo. The houses, the weathered little boat-landings, grew plainer to the eye. And then the priest's heart sank like a stone in his breast. There was trouble here.

Down by the landings were women and children and a few old men, now plainly to be seen. Not a lugger lay at moorings. All the able-bodied men of

Cheniere Lacroix were out in the Gulf of Mexico at their shrimp-trawling. And as those folk on the bank recognized the double-barred golden cross in the bow of the *St. Rita,* over the water rang their cry. It was the far-carrying hail of the Louisiana bayoús.

"Eh, la bas! Eh, la bas! Hola, Pere Girault! Viens ici! Vite, pour l'amour de Dieu!"

A growl rose in Bink Benton's throat.

"I reckon, *Padre,* our friend got heah ahead of us," he said.

Slowly and smoothly the little craft slid alongside the sagging wharf. Down to it surged the little crowd of the helpless of Cheniere Lacroix, all crying out at once.

"Silence!" the little priest commanded. "You, Bobo Boudreaux!" He pointed to a crippled old man in the midst of them. "You speak for them all. Tell us what has happened."

But before the first words of Bobo Boudreaux reached his ears, he knew. The sobs of Armaid Perrin's widowed mother, told him everything.

"Big Maurepas," said Bobo Boudreaux slowly, while his hard old hand caressed a swelling bruise on his forehead. "He came in that cabin cruiser of his, with six men. All our men are away with the shrimp fleet. Straight to the Perrin house he went, while his men with axes smashed the pirogues so none could follow, if any were fool enough to try. Flat to the floor he struck Madame Perrin when she tried to take up the shotgun of Louis. He grabbed Armaid and down to the boat he came with her, *la petite* screaming and struggling. Then with laughter from him and his men they cast off and went away."

The flood of bayou French ended in silence. It was Bink Benton's voice that broke it, almost instantly.

"Which way he go?" the old trapper demanded.

"Up-bayou, Bink."

The trapper nodded. "Like I thought. Come on, *Padre.* We gotta get goin'. Yo'-all got any drums o' gasoline?"

"Two, Bink," said Bobo Boudreaux. "She is in the house of Felix Crepelle."

"Come on, Eenyas," called Bink. "Shake a leg, you Cajun hookworm. We gotta move."

Fast as men could work they filled the *St. Rita's* tanks.

"'F Ol' Man Cap'n Didier shows up on th' *Heloise,* Bobo, tell him we headed fo' Mauvais Bois, y'hear me? An' tell him to come hell-a-tootin'."

Mooring lines splashed in the water as the *St. Rita* cast off. Silent and stern, Father Girault stood at the wheel.

"'Pears like Big Maurepas come out in the open an' run hawg-wild at last," said Bink meditatively. "Well, *Padre,* I ain't relyin' entirely on praying this time. It's not the first time wild hawgs was my meat."

But Father Girault was too troubled and sick at heart to answer him.

MAUVAIS BOIS. The Bad Woods. To most in the deep swamp it was only a name. Vaguely they knew it lay to the westward. Few had seen its fringes; fewer yet had penetrated its depths. It was off the routes the shrimp fleet took. Men laid no trapping lines there.

It was a tangle of huge and twisted liveoaks draped with thick Spanish moss, and all about them a dense tangle of undergrowth. Alternating with these ancient trees came wet stretches of gloomy cypress forest.

It seemed as if the spirits of evil sought to guard the spot, not only from the light of day, but from all human visitors. Green-headed, metallic flies filled the air in swarms, and their bite on human flesh was like the lancing pain of a tiny knife-blade. Great swamp mosquitoes flew there in clouds.

A city man who entered there was a dead man.

Here was the spot toward which the *St. Rita* was chugging sturdily down Bayou des Serpents.

More than an hour ago the sun had set. Night mists were rising from the black bayou waters. Jungle vegetation loomed as masses carved from solid coal. Here and there a great liveoak, moss-draped on the bank, seemed to be a squatting bearded giant, seated in moody thought beside the water's edge.

Mile after mile the little mission-boat ploughed along. Bink Benton was leaning now against the golden cross in the bow, calling back steering orders to Father Girault at the wheel. All lights were out, at the old trapper's order. Now and then, reluctantly, he flashed on the little searchlight, peered ahead into what its bright beam revealed, and swiftly switched it off again.

His voice was becoming low and guarded as he called back to the steering priest.

Two hours of this had seemed like an age to Father Girault before he heard Bink's voice above the throb of the motor.

"Shut off yo' engine, *Padre!*"

Utter silence enveloped them now. The *St. Rita* drifted slowly with the faint move of the bayou current. It was so still that the whining song of a mosquito could be heard. Bink Benton had moved back from the bow to stand close beside the priest.

"Theah," he said, softly and suddenly. "Listen."

Father Girault leaned forward in the intensity of his listening. Only the lap of the water sounded in his ears at first, faint and velvet-gentle. Only the splash of water as some giant alligator-gar rose in the dark, curved above the surface, and sank again. Only the mosquito song.

"What is it, Bink?" he asked softly. "I hear nothing."

"Keep on a-listenin'."

Again the little priest's ears strained into the dark.

"There's something," he said at last, his voice hushed. "It's far away and muffled. It almost sounds like the beating of my own heart."

"It ain't your heart, *Padre.* But it's timed to the same beat. Yo' got it now. Voodoo drums."

Faint and far away they pulsed through the jungle growth, over the still black water. There was something sinister in the very way they crept into the consciousness of the listener, like the stealthy padding of a jungle tiger.

Involuntary, a chill coursed through the body of the little priest. Equally involuntary, a hot flush of anger followed.

"Can you take us there?" asked Father Girault. His voice had the rasp of steel blade drawn from scabbard of steel.

"Sho' as hell, *Padre.* That's right wheah we're headed this holy minute."

THE next hour was sheer nightmare. There was no help now from that sturdy motor. With laboring push-poles against soft mud banks they made their silent way down a narrow black channel, the jungle growth brushing the sides of the little cruiser, brushing even their faces as it almost met above the center of the stream.

Clouds of insects settled on them. They seemed powerless against the leathery skin of the old trapper and Ignace ignored them as one born to the bayous. And so intent and filled with wrath was the little priest that what would have been torture normally now passed unnoticed.

Voodoo drums in his parish!" His parish! His wiry body strained against the push-pole as though he were fighting some grim battle for life in the dark.

Bink Benton's hand on his arms stopped him in mid-struggle to recover the pole that had sunk deep in oozing mud. Ignace already had received the same signal.

"Tie her up here against th' bank,"

Bink whispered. "Then come below."

He turned to Ignace.

"You'n me, we turn her around so she points the way we came," he whispered again. "Tie her to this chinaberry tree jus' by the stern line. Then I tell you what we'll do."

They could barely manage to swing the *St. Rita* around, so narrow was the channel, but with infinite pains they made the maneuver in silence. Then, stepping down the companionway one by one, they huddled in the little cabin. Bink Benton was in full command.

"Yo' got buckshot shells fo' that shotgun o' yo'n, *Padre?*" he asked.

"I carry no weapon such as that," began the little priest indignantly, when Bink cut him short.

"Nobody's askin' you to," he said. "I want Eenyas t' have it heah, so's he can fire into the underbrush an' scare 'em if any of 'em tries to grab the boat. Buckshot makes one hell of a racket. Savvy, Eenyas?" And the dark, which concealed Ignace's grin of understanding, carried back his hoarse whisper that he understood, and that there were several boxes of shotgun shells in a locker from last season's hunting.

"Fine," said Bink. "Now us, *Padre*, we're leavin' Eenyas here an' leggin' it. This is th' back way to that voodoo temple. It's the way I come myself, time I told yo' I was heah. We'll scout up quiet like, see what's happenin' an' what we can do about it.

"Eenyas, if you hear any hollerin' or shootin', you fire a couple shots, and be ready to cast off the minute we're aboa'd. An' don't let nobody get aboard 'ceptin' the *Padre* an' me an' whoeveh we're bringin' with us. That'll be Armaid Perrin, I reckon, if'n it's anybody."

They paused a moment at the foot of the companionway, as Bink opened the little screened door.

"Them drums are a blessin', at that," he said. "They ain't goin' to hear us if we fell down a flight o' stairs."

The rising throb and thunder of those drums seemed to fill the world now, it was so close.

"Hook yo' hand in my belt, *Padre,*" said Bink, as their feet sank ankle-deep in the oozy mud of the bank.

Then, as in a nightmare intensified, they were walking a muddy trail in which their feet made sucking sounds, and ever the drums grew louder, louder.

TO Father Girault the way seemed endless. His black cassock was tucked high about his waist. He was wet to the knees. His shoes spurted muddy water at every step. Thorns and saw-grass tugged at the legs of his trousers, and cut the serge like a knife. His left hand, extended, gripped the belt of the old trapper.

Then, their eyes accustomed now to the dense blackness, they perceived ahead of them a faint glow through the dark.

Bink halted. Through the trees they could see, now, the big bed of embers of a dying fire, and in the background of that glow a structure of some sort took shape against the night.

"Theah she is, *Padre,*" Bink whispered huskily. "Now listen close. No need for you to hold my belt now. Jus' follow me. I'm scoutin' around to the back. This heah's the side of it we're facin'.

"She's walled an' thatched with latanier palm, *Padre.* I aim to cut myse'f a peep-hole with this knife, an' see what's goin' on 'fo' I take a hand."

Father Girault's grip on Bink's belt loosened. Like drifting shadows, the two floated through the night.

Silent and intent, Bink crept undetected to the rear wall of the big shed-like structure with its corner-poles of saplings, its thatched roof and walls of latanier palm. Noiselessly he went to work. Not the faintest crackle sounded above the steady throb of the drums

within. It was only the work of minutes to make a peep-hole through which he could see clearly.

His life had been the kind that toughens a man's innermost fibre. But what he saw sent a shiver of horror pulsing from head to feet.

FEW men who are not initiates into the cult of Damballa have seen the sight on which the trapper's keen old eye was focussed.

Some sixty feet square was the single room. Its floor was pounded black swamp earth. Along the walls, two and three deep, the voodoo worshipers were seated. Their skins ranged from the blackest the African Congo ever bred, to the swarthy white. Here were the worst that the deep swamp could breed.

Men and women, side by side, they sat swaying to the rhythmic pulsing of the drums, that surging surf of sound which seemed to make the air vibrate with evil. And the swishing of shot in dried gourds that filled the pauses between the thump of drums was like the waters of a satanic surf sweeping back over harsh sands.

They were drunk already on raw sugarcane rum, but they were doubly drunk with the voodoo spell. And their eyes were fastened on the open space in the center of their temple.

There on a chair on a low platform sat Aramid Perrin, bound with cords to her seat. In the girl's face was a look of livid horror. What was before her eyes justified it.

There was a box-like framework some four feet square, with solid wooden top and bottom and stout posts at the corners. The sides were a mesh of wire. Plainly visible within was a giant king snake all of six feet long.

And toward the center of the room from where the bound girl sat, between the caged snake and the firepit, was spread the altar of the obscene god whose worshipers knew him as Damballa and Gran' Zombi.

It was a square of dirty red cloth the size of a sheet, draped over another low platform. At its corners black candles burned. Here and there on its surface lay the symbols of the jungle cult.

A pile of yellow grains of corn. A tangle of goat-ribs, blanched white. A shallow dish in which rum gleamed yellowly. Bundles of feathers, black and yellow and red, tied with wisps of red and black ribbon. The skull of a goat with horns. The skull of a swamp rabbit. A little heap of black swamp earth. And other dishes by the dish of rum, filled with boiled rice, with boiled red beans. And beside them, dishes empty with a sinister emptiness. Almost one could guess what diabolic ritual would fill them, and with what.

Beside this altar, tethered by their legs to little stakes driven in the earthen floor, blinking in the flame of the fire, stood a kid, its little horns just budding, a black rooster and a white rooster.

And between this array of the symbols of hell Big Maurepas leaped and danced in obscene ritual.

He was stripped to the waist. Bare-legged, bare-footed, his only garment was a pair of dungarees, ripped raggedly short just below the knees. A demoniac light gleamed in his muddy eyes.

"Ohe!" his voice rose in sudden chant. "I call you. *Viens! Viens!* Damballa! Gran' Zombi! Ezilee! *Viens! Viens!* We await you! Ogoun Badagris! Papa Legba!"

For the briefest of moments he paused. Then he spun like a top. And pausing again, with arms outstretched, he bellowed a chant straight out of Africa itself.

"Eh! Heh! Bomba! Hen! Hen!
Canga bafio le!
Canga moun de la!
Canga de ki la!
Canga li!"

Faster now was the tempo of the drums, as a racing heart beats faster. More furious the swish of the gourds.

"Jean Macouloumba!" howled Big Maurepas, his eyes starting into space. "He thirsts! Heh! Jean Macouloumba, now you drink!"

He stooped to where the black cock was tethered. He rose with the rooster held by the legs in one hand, in the other, a long-bladed cane knife like a machete.

Dizzily he started to spin. The black cock spun with him, wings spread wide from the pressure of the air. Then the spinning stopped.

With a flashing slash of the cane knife, the fowl's head flew through the air. And as the bright blood spurted, Bink Benton drew his breath with a sudden startled gasp.

All this time he had thought Father Girault was standing behind him in the dark.

Now, before his very eyes, the little priest was striding through the opening, sheer wonderment the drums went silent.

"STOP!" There was thunder in the voice of Father Girault that outroared the thunder of the voodoo drums. And in sheer wonderment the drums went silent,

From every side and corner of the room, murky eyes glared through the murky air at the militant figure in their midst.

His black cassock muddied and torn, his biretta jammed firmly on his head, Father Girault stood there, his heavy brass crucifix, drawn from his girdle and held high. And steel rang in his voice.

"Maurepas!" he thundered. "Set that girl free!"

But if the man had been dangerous before, he was a maniac now.

"*Ohe*, little priest!" he bellowed, insane with the surge of primitive hysteria he had aroused in himself as well as his besotted followers. "You come in time! Black cock! White cock! Kid! Girl! They are fine blood sacrifice on the altar of Damballa! But a priest of God is better yet!"

High in the smoky air rose the glittering broad blade of the great cane knife. High in air to meet it in parry, by sheer human instinct in the taut muscles of Father Girault, rose the gleaming heavy crucifix of brass.

And then before those eyes a miracle took place.

The cane knife was rising yet, as the crucifix was rising to meet it, when Big Maurepas' left arm flung high in air. His huge body, shining with sweat in the firelight, tensed and relaxed and fell forward. Limp, lifeless, he lay sprawled at the little priest's feet.

From the lips of the voodoo worshipers rose a groan that ended in a scream of stark fear. But the little priest was unafraid.

"Stay where you are!" he thundered. His sweeping gesture with that crucifix held them as bonds could not have held. Big Maurepas, untouched, had died as it rose before his face. Not one of the besotted worshipers but feared his turn was next.

Stooping, Father Girault picked up the cane knife from where it had fallen out of the dead man's limp hand. Straight past that obscene altar he strode, straight to the chair where the bound girl sat.

Half a dozen touches of the blade's keen edge, and she was free.

"Come with me, my daughter," said the little priest. And followed by those murky eyes in which stark fear now dwelt, he led her to the opening that served as door.

One black form, shining with sweat, eyeballs rolling in frenzy, rose to follow with a leaping rush. But as the swamp black cast aside his drum and rose, he too pitched forward on his face and lay

still. Rigid as though bound, the voodoo worshipers held their places while girl and priest vanished.

"THIS way, *Padre!* Quick!" It was Bink Benton's voice hissing in his ear.

Through the blackness they stumbled in their haste, the wet thick undergrowth brushing their faces, the oozy mud of the winding trail giving beneath their feet. Endless hours, it seemed, with ears strained for wild outcry behind them. But none came. Then Bink Benton's voice.

"Eenyas! Yo' theah?"

"Thees way, Beenk."

Splashing through the deeper ooze of the water's edge, they lifted the girl aboard the *St. Rita*. Flat on the deck she slumped, all consciousness fled, now that she felt safe at last.

"We're gettin' out like a bat outa hell," rasped Bink Benton's voice, "Me, I'll cast off. Yo' get that damn engine turnin' over. *Padre*, yo' stay with Armaid. Me, I'm steerin'. Eenyas, minute you get her started, come on deck with that shotgun an' put holes in anything you see or hear on the bank. I'm turnin' on that searchlight."

Simultaneously with the throb of the motor, the bright little beam bored ahead into the darkness. The *St. Rita* surged away from that spot of horror, boring down the winding narrow channel toward the outer bayou and freedom.

They were out, clear in the wider reaches of Bayou des Serpents, when Father Girault returned on deck.

"How is she, *Padre?*" came Bink's voice from the wheel.

"Sleeping, Bink. In my berth. I gave her tablets that I carry in my medicine case. Thank God they did not harm her."

The little priest's voice was deep and sober. "Were it not for that silent weapon of yours, Bink, I should be dead tonight in Mauvais Bois."

Father Girault's voice trailed off into silence.

It was embarrassing to Bink Benton. The old tone of bantering jest was in his voice as he said, with a touch of a chuckle:

"Don't fo'get my three killin's today, *Padre*. Think I can square myse'f with th' high sheriff when he gets outa th' hospital—Let alone Up Yondeh?"

"God and man alike can forgive you for that, Bink," said the little priest soberly, "for today you were the Scourge of God against the forces of evil."

Bright light flooded across them then. Around a bend of Bayou des Serpents, rumbling, came the *Heloise*. Alongside them she came, bristling with armed men from the Bayou Placide shrimp platform. Swiftly they lashed the *St. Rita* to her guards; swiftly boarded her and told their tale.

"Listen, Padre," said Bink. "You know your way back to Cheniere Lacroix from heah. All this racket's goin' wake li'l Armaid up, in spite of all the sleepin' medicine you give her. You and Eenyas, you head for her mama. We boys got a voodoo temple to burn down. Come on. Get goin'."

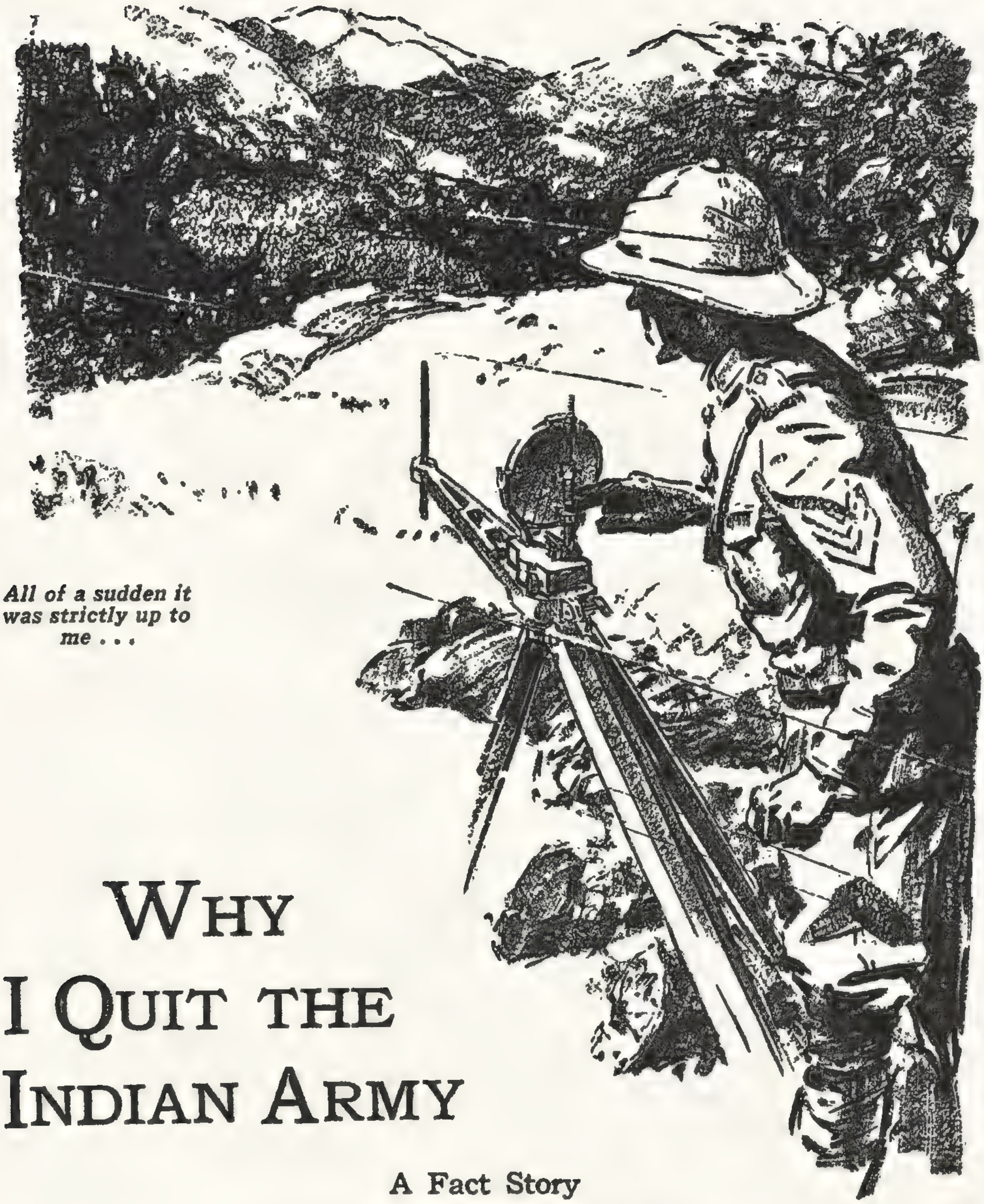
UP IN the pilot house beside Ol' Man Cap'n Didier and Big Octave of Bayou Placide platform stood Bink Benton, his pirogue resting on the *Heloise's* lower deck, watching the little searchlight of the *St. Rita* far down the bayou.

"Fella, you had yo'self one hell of a go-round for an old man," said Big Octave.

"What yo' mean, old?" demanded Bink. "It's a good thing for this swamp country they got a few of us old men left."

He turned to Ol' Man Cap'n.

"Have Hawg-head rustle me up anotheh cup o' coffee, Didier," he said. "An' say, what's a Scourge o' God? I been called plenty in my life, but today's the first time anybody eveh called me that."



All of a sudden it was strictly up to me . . .

WHY I QUIT THE INDIAN ARMY

A Fact Story

By PERRY ADAMS

SAID the general: "Don't sit there and tell me you're going home. Nonsense!"

We faced each other across his big desk at divisional headquarters. On that desk lay my recent memo to the colonel of my regiment, requesting that I be returned to civil life as soon as possible. The divisional commander stared at me, shaking a crisp gray head.

That he had sent for me this way, without having either my colonel or brigadier present, was flattering. His implied concern was more so. It came at a moment when I felt pretty low, too, but it must not alter my decision.

I said flatly, "I'm sorry, sir, but that's what I've got to do."

Sorry? Inadequate word. For me, quitting the Indian army was—well, at the time it seemed almost like the end of the world. Five years of the service lay behind me, perhaps the best years of my life. I'd loved every bit of it, every angle—the amazing efficiency, the sometimes crass stupidity, the hodge-podge of rule-of-thumb and tradition, all leavened with a wealth of hard common sense under intensely trying conditions.

It was a big job, with an empire at stake, and there was glamor enough for all in the manner of its doing. I'd loved the life, but most of all, I think, I'd loved the men with whom I'd been thrown in contact.

Yet how did I, an American, come to be in that army at all? To begin with, my family were migratory birds. I'd spent half my life in Europe—spells of school in England and Switzerland, a couple of winters at St. Moritz, several summers climbing in the Alps. Some of the closest friends I ever made as a kid were Englishmen I climbed with—many of them slated for military careers. By the time the world war came along, these fellows had finished Sandhurst, the English West Point, and were among the very first to go to France with their regiments.

In the early war months I happened to be in New York. One after another my friends were reported killed. It was a nightmare. I tried to look at the thing philosophically and failed completely. Damn it, these were *my* friends. That first war winter passed. Spring came—and the *Lusitania* was torpedoed. With her sank about thirty people I knew, Americans and English. Not mere acquaintances, most of them, but folks I'd known the greater part of my life.

I thought: "America'll declare war now. I'll be able to go to France and take a crack at that gang." But as you know, America didn't—then. Mr. Wilson kept sending notes. A month after the disaster I got the feeling the U.S. never *would* get into it. All right, but I would.

Canada: I'd slip up there, join the Princess Pats. Plenty of Americans were doing it. I was winding up my affairs in New York when an Englishman I knew dropped into my office to say good-by. He'd been working on the old *Sun*, but was a reserve officer of the Worcester Regiment and had just been recalled to the colors. I told him my own plans.

"Sail with me instead," he suggested. "The British have been short of interpreters, men who speak French and German. You know both, while I know the ropes at Whitehall. That combination'll get you an interpretership, which carries a commission with it."

It seemed a pretty passive way to fight my personal war and I said so. My acquaintance kept arguing that I'd be of more immediate use as an interpreter than in any other capacity. In the end I sailed with him.

A SHOCK awaited me in London. The War Office had concluded that the French were the natural ones for these interpreter jobs and had just stopped drawing on their own forces for the purpose. My friend went off with his regiment, leaving me wondering whether to apply for a commission in some line regiment or to join up in the ranks. It looked as if I'd get far quicker action by doing the latter, and so I enlisted in a territorial battalion of a London county regiment.

We were frantically trained for France, for the trenches. My keenest memories of those months are a constant feeling of utter exhaustion, of boots that crippled me, of dirt, discomfort—and slowly, too, out of that hectic experience, of somehow becoming dimly aware of the birth of what Talbot Mundy once called "The Soul of a Regiment". Suddenly came word that our first (regular) battalion

had been all but decimated. We were to leave for France at once.

The troop train, the scene at the military siding: A fellow in my compartment had a little old mother in a Queen Victoria bonnet and a rustling, voluminous black silk dress. She stood on the crowded platform, staring dumbly at her son through the rain. And I think I shall never forget her expression, it was so stonily wistful.

Shoulder to shoulder with this fellow I leaned from the open window.

He said huskily: "'Er, she ain't got no more tears. There wuz six of us, see, orl boys, 'n I'm the lawst. Me old man, 'e went West too, a month ago."

The train began to move. Until it became impossible to match its pace she moved with it, not knowing how she bumped and jostled those about her. *No more tears.* Watching her, trying to realize tithe of her wracking anguish, I couldn't help recalling the lines:

"If death be the price of Admiralty,
Lord God, we ha' paid in full!"

The train sped away, but soon it slowed and we were shunted to a sidetrack. It grew dark and still we lay there. Some time late in the night we rolled again—backward. The move had been canceled!

Ten days later the same draft embarked, not for France, but for—India. India? I felt utterly cheated. In the Suez we passed close to a transport loaded with Anzacs on their way to France.

"Where yer goin'?" they yelled at us.

"India," we had to admit.

"All yer bleedin' well fit fer," was the derisive reply. However that was, I know I'd have given an arm to have been able to change boats.

The Bombay docks: A pretty young Mahratta mother standing strangely alone as we warped in, slyly pinching her baby to make it cry.

"Backsheesh," she kept pleading, her voice hoarse, strident, as I was to learn are so often the voices of Indian women. For the baby's sake we threw her a little money. As all India knows, white men are fools.

And then a long trip, a rather terrible trip, in one of the old troop trains—wooden benches for four days, coaches hopelessly overcrowded, windows barred like a prison, and the late spring heat of the plains licking at us like tongues of live flame. Those old cars, they vanished after the Karachi troop train disaster in 1916. Some of the few who weren't baked alive in that holocaust were drafties for my regiment. I saw them come in. Anyone who could have viewed human beings in that condition without feeling deeply, had the soul of a louse.

Rawal Pindi, temporary journey's end: No room for us in barracks, no spare tents. We arrived in the dark, slept that first night in our great coats on the infield of the 'Pindi racecourse. It was moonless, but the stars were enormous and as artificial seeming as a background for a window setting you see in some department store before Christmas. I was dead tired, filthy, disgusted.

But at dawn something happened to me. I awoke just as the first pink shreds stained a blue-green sky. Beyond the racecourse lay a long low ridge, and along that skyline came an endless caravan of laden camels, head to tail, dead black in silhouette, silent, mysterious, infinitely romantic. Silly though it may sound, suddenly the East had me, and I was never to recover.

Followed a four days' trek into the Murree Hills, toward a conditioning station. Rest camp, march, rest camp, march. The dusty, winding way passed the Murree Brewery. As was then the heaven-sent custom, ice-cold kegs of beer had been rolled down along the line of march. Beer can be nectar. That was. On to Ghariał, where our feet rested on a sheer mud hill while our heads were in the clouds, and for backdrop, the

glistening, endless, white immensity of the Himalayas, tallest mountains in the world.

SOON we knew we were in *the* army. Things began to go with a click; there was logic, reason in every move. Brown-dry, scraped-smart N.C.O.'s took hold of us. They said "Forget what they taught you in Blighty. No good here. We'll teach you *soldiering*." The old regulars, bless 'em. They did. Up and down *khuds* we sweated, night and day, learning the rudiments of mountain warfare. No trenches here. When we could catch a breath we sang:

"*Wash me in the water that you wash your dirty daughter,*
And I shall be whiter than the white-wash on the wall."

Instead, we turned mahogany color. Sudden news: The First Durham Light Infantry, out for six months in the mud blockhouses along the electrified apron wire that stretches from Michni to Abazai—placed there to check too sudden Afridi incursions—the Durhams were coming in. We were to replace them.

We were ready. I saw Peshawar, fabled city, for the first time. Somewhere just beyond this gateway to India lay Kipling's Khyber, but we didn't see it —then. Our route from Peshawar went in a different direction.

"All *teek* and *pukkah*," the hard-faced Durhams told us as we took over, "them Zakka Khels, they been quiet as mice. Good luck."

Quiet as mice with the Durhams there —sure. For ten years that tough outfit had been throwing the fear of God into them. But it didn't take long for word to spread that new chums from Blighty were 'on the wire'. Long? The Zakkas had known all about it, of course, well before we ourselves did.

That wire, high tension and deadly as a coiled *karait*: First night out one of our men went for a short stroll. It was very dark, and, although all of us had been warned, he must have misjudged his distance and brushed or stumbled against it. A blinding blue flash. We picked him up, dead, forty feet away.

The Zakkas were well aware of what those 'Strings of Satan' could do. They'd learned the hard way, by piling their dead in acrid smelling heaps all over them. Now they had a new wrinkle. And here, made to order, was the chance to try it.

We lived a platoon to a blockhouse, commanded by a subaltern. A few nights later I woke to a sentry's hail. There was no answer.

We all listened.

"Sounds almost like it was cattle," the sentry said uncertainly.

"Cattle? Not much nourishment challenging *them*," our officer chided. The big searchlight was snapped on. Cattle it was, a herd of some twenty water buffalo.

The lieutenant yawned. "Put out that light. Get back to sleep, you men."

Suddenly, as if driven by some unnamed fear, the herd stampeded toward the wire. As they crashed it, blue flames shot skyward. Result? Roast beef on the hoof, literally.

But—the current was short-circuited. Over the harmless wire swarmed the Zakkas. All shadowy turbans and gleaming white teeth, crying, "*Din, Din—Allah Di-i-n!*" They were on us. That blockhouse was a mad place for some five long minutes, but platoons came from down the line and we drove the Afridis off.

We had plenty of casualties. Our officer had had his throat cut and was very dead. As we lined up for roll-call I noticed my bayonet was red-brown and hair-sticky. I think that night may have marked my first kill. I'd lunged at several of 'em, but one of the few things

I was dead sure of was that I had acquired one Grade-A black eye.

"Serves yer right," growled our sergeant. "'T's 'wot a bloke gets if 'e goes *lookin'* fer trouble. You should of done what I done. Me, I hid."

Yes, he did! I'd had brief flashes of the kind of hiding that sergeant had been up to; you could love men like that.

By the time we came off the wire the army had me. I'd seen character under pressure, men from Stepney and Limehouse, men I'm afraid I'd previously considered poor white trash' behaving with an unselfish nobility which opened my eyes. I'm eternally grateful for that lesson.

Followed spots of service here and there, spells of barracks and of living under canvas at Peshawar and Nowshera. I became a regimental signaler, for which I received six annas, or eighteen cents extra a day. Finally casualties and various tropical diseases reduced us below the strength a unit must maintain in the First Division. They can't have crocks in the frontier forces. Out we went.

IT LOOKED as if I'd been carried into a permanent backwash of garrison duty. To leave the regiment was a wrench, but when the chance came to transfer to signal service—then a branch of the Royal Engineers—I took it.

By sheer chance I dropped into a newly formed divisional signal company commanded by the famous Wise Man of Peshawar, then a captain. Soon there was trouble again on the frontier and off we went.

There was the incident of a heliograph and a message that had to go through. You can't always pick your spot when setting up a helio; you need first, sun, and second, a visual line to your distant station. As the ground lay, if we'd been able to work in the shade that day we wouldn't have been under fire. We couldn't, of course—and we were. Several of our section stepped up to the instrument, started to send, and sat down or keeled over very limply.

All of a sudden it was strictly up to me; but this is scarcely a vignette in the Frank Merriwell manner. I was scared to death. I always was, under fire. This way it was very bad, for you had to stand absolutely still, a perfect target, as you clicked off dots and dashes. Most of the message had been sent by the unfortunates who preceded me, and I was lucky enough to finish the remainder.

The business was observed by someone who happened along behind me, out of the range of fire. He sent for me. I was so blind with accumulated terror that I couldn't even see him. I started to walk in the wrong direction. Men of the section pulled me back, turned me round. Then I saw that the someone was our brigadier general. Still visibly shaking like the proverbial leaf, I anticipated being shot at sunrise for cowardice and felt I deserved it. Instead, he offered me a commission!

Afterward I talked it over with my boss, the Wise Man.

"I'd rather be an N. C. O. in your outfit than a general of division," I told him. "I don't want the commission."

He froze—solid.

"I don't care to listen to any more of that mawkish rot," he grated. "Your application goes up today. Dismiss!"

That was the Wise Man, and it wasn't until I talked to him as a commissioned officer that I learned it was my remark about being a general of division that had produced the ice storm. Funny chap, grand chap—a divisional commander himself now. Knowing him has colored my whole life.

Came a stretch in the Simla hills, learning my new job at an officer's school of instruction. One day my platoon commander, an Anzac V. C. who'd mislaid an arm in Flanders, or-

dered me to step out of the ranks and take the platoon in skeleton company drill. Silently he watched me as did the rest of the school, some six hundred strong, momentarily standing at ease.

"Adams," the Anzac bawled out at last, "in all my experience, you are the lousiest drill officer it has ever been my bad fortune to see."

After about a year with my regiment, of which more presently, the Third Afghan War broke out. The Wise Man pulled the strings, and I was loaned back to the signal company from which I'd been commissioned. I journeyed up through the Khyber and joined the outfit around Dakka, which for weeks we struggled to hold. During this, I was blown up by one of our own mines. It did me little good; the medicos decided I'd have to be shipped down country for general repairs.

The Wise Man stood beside the motor ambulance which would take me back through the Khyber to Peshawar. I believed it might be the last time I'd ever see him, and he may have had a similar thought.

"Damn you," he said in a funny voice, "I changed you from an infantry private to an R. E. sapper, from sapper to corporal. I made you take a commission, and I took the trouble to get you back here with me, only to have a thing like this happen. What do you mean by being so damned *inconsiderate?*"

The Wise Man I loved best of all.

Yes, I'd seen the Indian service as perhaps few Americans have seen it, and found it good. Mighty good. And now there was just one thing that prevented my staying on, and I wanted desperately to stay—money.

"I'M SORRY," I told the general.

It was November, 1919, and a monstrous hot day. Across the years I can still feel that heat, still catch exactly the mood of the instant. The general sat drumming his fingers lightly on the desk, and I noticed that, over our heads, the *punkah* had almost ceased its rhythmic sweep. All at once the snap of a drooping head must have awakened the dozing, born-weary *punkah wallah* outside the door, for the *punkah* oscillated violently, breaking the narrow beams of sunlight that stabbed white hot through the blinds.

The general glanced up mechanically, then dropped his eyes to mine.

"Why do you feel you have to go? Is it the usual reason—money? See here. Haworth is marrying that green-eyed redhead of his; they're going back to live on the fat of his Cornish moors. That'll make you brigade signaling officer. Other changes are imminent. Within a couple of years you might even be divisional signaling officer. I'll handle that."

He was regarding me expectantly, and I realize as I write this that he looked remarkably like the late Sir Guy Standing.

"Grand if it would work, sir," I said regretfully, well knowing how all that extra staff pay would help keep my head above water, "but I'm a lieutenant commissioned not quite two years ago. You'd want a captain for the brigade job and someone of field rank for the divisional. A lieutenant in either would be at a hopeless disadvantage, outranked at every turn. He'd never get anything done. The trouble is, I haven't the seniority for a legitimate promotion."

He frowned. "Seniority? Hang it, man, we can take care of that. Give you temporary rank—"

"But that, sir," I broke in, "can no longer be done. You recall that army order—no more temporary ranks?"

He could scarcely have forgotten it, but he probably had not thought to apply the ruling to a case like mine. His proposal was impossible. Because of the war, many wealthy civilians with pull had wanted to be identified with the service without incurring any of its dan-

gers. Often without special qualification, they had been given field rank, even made generals, so that they might hold down the many highly paid, non-combatant staff jobs that abound in India as in every army.

So many of these people lingered on after the Armistice that the bars had been suddenly put up with a vengeance. As I'd just reminded the general, there were to be no more temporary ranks. Automatically, the order washed out these arm-chair red tabs who had never done a day's real soldiering in their lives.

Thus, soldier though I had become, and with the requisite technical experience for the jobs mentioned, I was the somewhat unfortunate victim of a blanket order aimed at different game entirely. Yet withal a mighty wise ruling.

And so I had to quit, because without income other than my pay of rank, I was finding it impossible to live. Of course, the war produced thousands of men like myself—fellows commissioned from the ranks, and all in much the same rickety boat so far as finances went. Somehow, but chiefly because the period was limited, we'd muddled through. But one could scarcely go on that way indefinitely. The post-war army in India was now fast being boiled down to a professional residue, which means as to officers, career men with some income other than their pay. An officer without such extra income was in bad case indeed. Bear with me and I'll try to explain why.

UNLIKE officers in the British army, where there is a 'base rate' with sundry substantial allowances for this and that, those of the Indian army receive what is termed a 'consolidated rate'. At first blush this inclusive sum looks quite promising.

In my day and still, so far as I know, the pay of officers of Indian units commenced at four hundred and three rupees, twelve annas a month. During the war the value of the rupee, about fifty cents in American money, was considerably higher than at present. Thus, then, a subaltern's pay was just over two hundred dollars a month. Doesn't sound so bad, does it? Wait.

Take the very outfit into which I was gazetted—infantry of the line, a good, solid regiment, but nothing extra fancy. Had we been permanently isolated in some remote spot, such as a fort in tribal hills or even a one-regiment, minor garrison station elsewhere, whatever social life that existed would have been confined to the officers of the unit—say fifteen men plus and the small group of supernumeraries which surrounds a regiment no matter where it is. Under such circumstances, were one a 'nickel nurser' as well as definitely anti-social, the pay might have sufficed.

My regiment was otherwise quartered and the foregoing is surmise, based on the assumption that messing costs, which are only the beginning of an officer's expense in the large stations, might come fairly close to being inclusive in the very small ones.

The costs of messing vary from regiment to regiment; in mine, the charge was three rupees ($1.50) a day, a fair and nominal sum. This included quarters (often it doesn't) and all meals. Cheap enough for the excellent food and fine service we enjoyed, but still ninety rupees a month, almost a quarter of one's pay. Smokes and drinks, of course, were on top of that. These also were very fairly priced. Five annas (fifteen cents) for a *chota peg* (small whisky-soda) and nine for a *burrah peg* will indicate the scale. Yet when all one's chits were added up at the end of the month, the result was apt to be a shock. This part of my own mess bill was never less than a hundred rupees, and I held no records.

There were the various funds and guest nights. First, the mess fund. In the older regiments, this usually is sub-

stantial, since it has been built up over a long period. In ours, since we were a wartime second battalion, the mess fund had had no time to grow and always seemed to be in the red. It was supposed to take care of all sorts of odds and ends, many of which I have frankly forgotten.

One fairly trivial remembered item was ham. Others akin to it, bacon and pork sausage. You see, in India most butchers are Moslems, because all beef animals are sacred to the Hindu and he will not slaughter them. The Mohammedan, who thinks nothing of so doing, has a tabu of his own—pig. He will not touch it in any form. It is possible to buy pork products in India, but they are of doubtful origin and quality, and it is safest to send to England. Good ham comes high in India.

On weekly, or 'regular' guest nights, the mess fund presumably covered the cost of wining and dining sundry gentry who were distinguished from personal guests, classed as guests of the regiment. Since the fund was broke, the weekly levy on each officer was at least five rupees, or twenty a month. Usually a lot more. One's own guests were paid for on top of that.

Once a month came a ladies' guest night, too. Quite a glittering affair. After a few rounds of dinner cocktails, nothing but vintage champagne was consumed for the balance of the evening. One such night, I recall, fell during the Christmas Holidays. At about nine the next morning, after driving the rather too well entertained ladies to their respective bungalows, we returned to the mess to discover that the entertainment had cost more than a hundred rupees per officer. Fifty dollars, plus. Some fun, eh?

There was a band fund, ten a month. The Indian climate seemed impartially tough on woodwinds, brass and strings. The band forever needed something. Perhaps our musicians were a naturally careless lot.

The sport fund at twelve rupees: This covered both sports equipment for the men—football, hockey and the rest—and their incidental expenses when traveling as teams.

The *bewa* (widow) fund provided in addition to the government pension, security to the wives of our rank and file killed in the line of duty.

Ten rupees. Thus far, how do these figures look?

Mess Expense (only) per month

Messing (food, quarters)	Rs. 90	($45.00)
Drinks, smokes (low)	75	(37.50)
Mess fund (usually more)	20	(10.00)
Ladies' Guest Night, average	35	(17.50)
Personal officer-guests, about	20	(10.00)
Band Fund	10	(5.00)
Sports Fund	12	(6.00)
Bewa Fund	10	(5.00)
Total	Rs. 272	($136.00)

Subaltern's Pay, month

Rs. 403-12-0 (Then, approx. $202.00)
Rs. 272- 0-0 (Deduct)

Rs. 131-12-0 (Approx. $66.00) Balance remaining.

From these very conservative figures the item of bridge has been omitted. Table stakes with us were ten annas a hundred, or a third of a cent a point. No money ever changed hands. The signed scores were given the mess secretary. When at the end of the month the mess bills were computed, your net winnings were deducted from the total, or your losses were added.

We were all fair players, but no more, and over a long period the thing must have averaged up. Yet somehow the heavy losses always came at the most inconvenient time; in a month they could be as much as two hundred rupees or even more.

This would leave one nearly seventy rupees, or thirty-five dollars in the red. I do not say such a heavy loss was a steady diet; I show it here merely to indicate how easily one's entire pay could go at times.

EVERY officer had a bearer, or personal servant. No choice here. It had to be. With us, pay for these fellows was thirty rupees a month, or fifteen dollars. We also found their mess uniforms of white muslin at about four dollars a suit. My own man needed about six suits per year.

Although it was not absolutely compulsory for an infantry subaltern to have a horse, you were so out of things without one that I do not think it unfair to include it here as a mandatory item. One of the cheapest ways to pick up a fairly reliable animal was to visit the frequent cast sales held by mounted corps. Such a horse cost fifty rupees or less. His defects were brought to one's attention rather than hidden, as when buying out of the string of some itinerant Indian dealer. Safe to say such a beast was no *Man o' War*, but, unlike the dealer's country-breds, he was army trained and used to white men and generally there was a lot of riding left in him. A *syce* (groom) had wages of twenty rupees. Fodder for the horse varied between twelve and twenty rupees a month, or six to ten dollars. Stabling cost, say ten rupees, or five dollars.

If one played polo—but why go into that? It was a hopeless proposition for any but officers in the higher brackets. True, there were isolated instances where some crack player of small means was mounted by team mates or outside admirers, but we average to middling horsemen did not come within a hundred miles of being crack players.

I have already indicated that my regiment had home quarters in a big, expensive station. It was a city of over a million Indian population, with a huge cantonment to hold brigade, divisional and army headquarters and all that went with them. This meant a semi-permanent officer personnel of at least five thousand, often more. The place was top-heavy with senior career men, mostly very well off. Many had their women-folk on the spot. And you know what happens when well-to-do ladies with nothing but time on their hands enter such a picture: Festive events are the order of the day. Every day. These are bound to cost you a lot of money, even though they may be difficult to set down in cold figures.

But there is no difficulty setting down the following:

The *Gymkhana* was a club of which every officer automatically became a member the moment he was taken on our strength. This place might best be compared to the conventional American country club. There was a fine clubhouse, tennis courts and playing field for various team sports, including polo. All kinds of teas, garden parties and dances were held here. The monthly dues were fifty rupees, or twenty-five dollars.

Refreshments and the omnipresent trivia for which is constantly signing chits in such places came to at least another twenty-five dollars. I never came close to spending so little a month for extras there, but let it go. Assume some men did, if you like.

Also required was membership in the Yacht Club, an impressive edifice on a muddy river which saw lfttle actual sailing. Although the dues at the Yacht were identical to those at the *Gymkhana*, the place was considered very swanky, with incidental prices to match. We didn't use this much because it was more inaccessible and offered fewer diversions. Nevertheless, my monthly bill there, in addition to dues, was seldom less than forty dollars and often considerably higher.

We're by no means through, but let's stop a second and again bring our totals up to date. I omit initial cost of the horse as being impossible to prorate. He might last a month and he might last for years. Also the bridge item is too varying to include. So I'll assume it averages up, as I said, and leave it out.

Subaltern's Pay
Rs. 403-12-0
Outgo, monthly, to date

Messing, as previously	Rs. 272	$136
Bearer	30	15
Clothes for bearer, prorated	4	2
Syce (groom for horse)	20	10
Fodder, horse, say	16	8
Stabling	10	5
Gymkhana dues	50	25
Gymkhana chits (low)	50	25
Yacht club dues	50	25
Yacht chits	80	40
	Rs. 582	$291

Now we are some one hundred and eighty rupees, or ninety dollars in the red. A bad bridge month might put us correspondingly further behind, but don't let's think of that just now!

Optional were a golf and a gun club. I belonged to neither. Many of our officers did, but why pile it on? When I wanted a round of golf I paid a greens fee and let it go at that, and I'd seen enough professional shooting while a ranker to tide me over until my next stretch of service in the field.

There was a turf club, too, which about three times a year drew the best horses in India for as fine flat racing as I've ever seen. One needed cash and plenty of it for those meets. No one in my regiment was a member except the colonel, who was on the board of governors as well. The internationally known Aga Khan also was a board member and made a practice of racing his fine stable at every meeting.

Manifestly, you saved money by avoiding these race meetings, but none of us did. You could also keep away from every other club and thus save all but your dues; again, none of us did.

AND now, what of one's clothing, military and civil? In India, where it is considered bad form for an officer to be in uniform unless duty compels, one needs plenty of mufti. You have white and cloth mess kit for evening wear, the latter expensive, but as a general rule you wouldn't don either sort to spend an evening at a private bungalow; you'd put on a dinner coat. Were the party a large one, white tie and tails would be worn. Tailors are a patient breed, but soon or later even they must be paid.

Pocket money: Although you sign chits for almost everything, there are plenty of occasions when you must pay in cash. Regularly I got rid of at least fifty dollars a month like this; it used to amaze me, because I didn't, theoretically, have it to spend. You've already seen why.

What about leave? Periodically every officer is granted substantial vacations. Are you going to spend such time in a big chair of your own mess, reading good books? Scarcely. There's time enough for that when you're officially in residence. Officers on leave run up to such hill stations as Darjeeling, Missuorie and Murree; they go on *shikar*—take a fling at tiger or other big game; they go pig-sticking, or perhaps decide on Kashmir for a little houseboating about Srinagar, or, say, journey south to view the wonders of Ceylon. There are endless ways to spend a fascinating vacation in India, but where is the money coming from?

It is harder still to answer that question when we make a final reckoning. Such items as spending money (cash), clothing and leave are difficult to figure, so I'll take my own remembered expenses and divide them in half. I think that should satisfy everyone.

Subaltern's Pay, Month
Rs. 403-12-0
Expense—Monthly

Previously totalled	Rs. 582	($291.00
Clothing & equip. prorated	25	12.50
Cash outlay	50	25.00
30-day leave, prorated (v. low)	25	12.50
Grand Total	682	$341.00

Well, on these figures it is true one

isn't spending quite double his pay, although I did that, and more. Granted, certain expenses vanish when one goes on service.

This is spasmodic, but if we say the average officer spends one quarter of his time in the field, the estimate may approach accuracy. Yet if you belong to a regiment with home station in some large place, like mine, the trouble is first, the periods of service don't bulk long enough to help you out of the red, and secondly, all your fixed expenses, by which is meant mess funds, club dues, bearer, *syce* horse fodder, stabling and so forth, go on and on no matter where *you* are. What service you get is a help, but no more.

I could have asked for a transfer to some regiment permanently stuck off in the wilds and thus come closer to balancing the budget.

Frankly, such a prospect didn't attract me.

The thing that made army life in India fascinating to me was *contrast.* In station—our station, at least—you lived like a young nabob, a highly developed civilization all about you, with its luxuries, color and variety. A week or a month hence your vermin-ridden body might be baking under a merciless sun, while turbanned fanatics took pot-shots at you and you sucked an empty water bottle with cracked and broken lips. Yet no matter what you did, always you did it with men you had learned to love and trust, men who are surely the salt of the earth.

I wanted to stay, because no life I'd lived had more appeal; a return to commercial pursuits in this country seemed a pretty drab, tasteless prospect after India.

Yet the moment came when I had to face reality.

Oddly, it was a few casual sentences uttered by my colonel one Sunday morning at breakfast, rather than careful analysis of my own case, which finally impelled me to see that this best of all possible games still was not worth the candle.

Hailing from a family of traditional soldiers, the colonel was just starting his career when his family lost every penny. He carried on with nothing but his pay.

"But damned if I'd do it again," he confessed, wrinkling up hard, wise eyes that had looked upon more than thirty years of service. "Why even today, a full colonel, I'm still paying off debts incurred as a subaltern. I've never been free of 'em and I probably never shall be!"

No, a prospect like that wasn't good enough.

I began to circulate around town, making farewell calls. That was easy. And strangely, it was easy so far as my own mess was concerned, for there were others going home, and most of the day and night officers from all the units stationed with us were coming and going, until the mess reminded one of the concourse in Grand Central Station around holiday time.

Came the final *durbar,* when I formally shook hands with our Indian officers.

Remained nothing to do but to catch the night mail for Bombay and the P. & O. steamer. Late that afternoon I had occasion to pass our guardhouse, on my way to Q. M. stores on some trivial errand.

The sentry gave me the usual rifle salute. But on my way back, I was amazed to hear his "Guard, stand to," and, as I got nearer, "Guard, turn out!" A lieutenant didn't rate that, and they knew it.

Yet I think the good will implied by the gesture of that guard salute affected me more than anything else that happened.

All in all it's a grand life, take it from me, if you have the wherewithal.

THE CAMP-FIRE

OUR Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with the June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard and welcomed.

WE are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The spirit of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

BUT something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

PERHAPS our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different stations toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

IF YOU are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

CAMP-FIRE comrades will recall the letters from ex-sourdoughs which followed publication of the story of the fatal snowslide in Chilkoot Pass during the Alaskan gold rush in 1898. One of those letters was from A. P. Hughes, who hoped the word would reach Tommy Riggs, who later became Governor of Alaska. We have the following letter from Mr. Riggs, from his office in Washington, D. C., where he is United States Commissioner of the International Boundary Commission.

I have just been handed a copy of *Adventure* for May containing an account of the great snow slide on Chilkoot Pass in April, 1898, wherein Mr. F. B. Holbrook tells of his adventures.

In the July number my old friend, A. P. Hughes, writes of his recollection of the event and suggests that if "Tommy Riggs . . . is still alive, he should . . . give you the true story of the event."

I should like Mr. Hughes to know that Tommy Riggs is still very much alive and so is his old partner "Handsome Harry" Irvine, who lives at Sechelt, B. C. I doubt if either of us, however, could negotiate the Chilkoot Pass of 1898 as we then did. I can assure him, though, that the joys of outdoor life, in a modified form, appeal as they did forty years ago.

Unfortunately I have no first hand story of the tragedy. This is how I remember it:

In March our outfit had crossed the pass with that of "Three Fingered" Jack McKay and was at Linderman. A few days before the slide I recrossed the pass and went in to Dyea to mail letters and get the last news from home. While there word was received that, due to a storm, travel had been blocked, so there was little use in moving back into the discomforts of Sheep Camp, or the Scales. When in the course of a few days I did get back to Sheep Camp, the bodies of the men who perished in the snow had been brought in. There were wild tales of the robbing of bodies and of the outfits of those who had perished. This I do not believe. A miners' committee had been immediately formed and as the dead were brought in, their possessions were listed, sealed, and later turned over to the U. S. Commissioner at Dyea for the benefit of the heirs. Robbery on the trail was not tolerated in those days. I have heard tales of some other robberies, but in our own case our cache was frequently left unguarded for days at a time and never disturbed except by roving dogs.

With the exception of the fatal snow slide, I have always thought that the perils of Chilkoot Pass have been somewhat exaggerated. Tales of adventure grow more exciting as the years pass. Certainly Chilkoot Pass did not present the days of misery found on the trail to the White Pass via the Skagway route. It was, of course, hard, grinding work and the unfit fell out, but the majority of the Argonauts were physically sound and took things as they came. There were the usual number of fist fights and profanity reached sublime heights. An epidemic of meningitis carried off a number of men. Everywhere the helping hand was in evidence. Strange to relate it was the white collar boys who complained the least.

And so I have no authoritative yarn. I was not there and when for the last time I passed by that place of terror there was only the long line of pack laden men headed into the unknown.

AT THE beginning of Camp-Fire we print again in two-column measure the few paragraphs that explain the idea of Camp-Fire. I am not sure that credit has ever been properly given. It was written years ago by A. S. H., and after his departure from active duty became the property of the magazine and has appeared at intervals. It will continue to appear now and again, as a reminder, and because it expresses completely the spirit, and because it is a fine piece of writing.

A WORD of explanation might go along with the Perry Adams article in this issue. We've published a number of his authentic stories of India. A while ago he came to town, and we had lunch. I asked him how he, an American, came to be fighting in Afghanistan. In telling me, he became so enthusiastic about the British forces there that I then inquired why he had left. I asked him to put it all in an article.

WE OWE thanks to Carl M. Lagerberg, of Keene, New Hampshire, for the pains he has taken in the matter of the leather gun, which was the fea-

ture of a British Army in India story by Perry Adams.

Comrade Lagerberg sends to Camp-Fire this interesting item:

I read with great interest Mr. Perry Adams' story "A Change of Boots" in *Adventure* and also his letter about leather guns in the same issue. Well, a leather gun can really be paralleled, and that in Stockholm, Sweden, where there is one on exhibition in the Royal Arms Museum which is part of the Northern Museum there. I have seen it there many times, where it stood among many relics from the 30 Years War, slick and well preserved, in spite of the stormy existence it led for about a year on the many battlefields in Germany.

However, it is now about forty-five years since I last saw it, and as man's memory doesn't improve with the years, and to get a correct description of the gun, I wrote the museum in Stockholm, and in due time got a description of it, also pictures from the director, Baron Rudolf Cederstrom.

An Austrian Colonel Melchio Wurmbrant came to Sweden in 1625. On March 12, 1627, he received commission from King Gustavus Adolphus to manufacture leather guns, and in August 22 of the same year, the first fourteen guns were delivered and sent to the Swedish army in Poland. They were three and six-pounders and mounted on a wheel carriage, very much like guns of more modern times.

The leather guns were of great tactical advantage, but also had a setback in that they got hot quickly and after ten shots had to be cooled off. They were used by the Swedes in the Polish war, and only one year of the 30 Years War, 1630. Their place was thereafter taken by a light iron gun, a regiments piece, constructed by the Swedish gunmaker Hans Henrik Liegroth.

The leather gun's construction: A copper tube reinforced with iron rods running lengthwise, held by iron hoops, the whole wound round with rope, bedded in mastix or mastich. Wood gives the gun its form, on top of that a coat of canvas and last heavy leather which on some guns was painted, and on some bronzed. The muzzle is smoothed out with lead.

The Walsh tale of Montrose hits me, because the only serious mistake he made was to send word to Black Archy Johnstone of Warristoun that he, Montrose, would hang him, Archy, at sight. Archy, on the goose and gander principle, said "first catch your hare," and set a trap into which Montrose walked; so Archy hanged Montrose, giving rise to Campbell's fine poem beginning:

"Come hither, Allan Cameron, and stand
beside my knee;
I hear the river roaring down toward
the wintry sea, etc."

Even 75 years later Scott, who considered it blasphemy to say "Montrose" without a genuflection, was very peevish with Archy; but those who take the sword will perish by the sword.

H. Bedford-Jones' story of the *Monitor* intrigued me. I knew Commodore Worden when I was a young man in Washington, and asked him about the sinking of the *Monitor* in a blow. He told me that the turret rested on a bronze ring set in the deck, and was ground to a working fit on it with emery; after which the turret was raised, the joint washed out and grease substituted, making an absolutely waterproof fit; in battle the turret was lifted about four inches; by some blunder the ship went to sea with the turret raised, and the elevator jammed so it could not be lowered. The sea washed in and sank the ship.

The design was the same as the whalebacks on the lakes, and entirely seaworthy, though rolling somewhat because of the weight of the 15 inch Rodman rifles in the turret.

I have always regretted the passing of the fine old naval rank of Commodore, graced by the names of Decatur, Jones, Preble and Porter, not to name all the great sailors in it; but the reasons of precedence were good.

I also knew General Joe Johnstone when he was Indian Commissioner in Washington; he was my father's cousin. He told me General Sherman did nothing but what the laws of war allowed; but the rabble following the armies did most of the mischief for which the armies got the blame. As he said, "dead soldiers were plenty, and uniforms were easy to get"; both sides shot these fellows at sight, but they were hard to catch.

WE HEAR again from "Teejay" after a considerable interval. His voice was a familiar one here in earlier days.

RAYMOND S. SPEARS. *Ask Adventure* expert and *Adventure* author and authority on wild-life conservation, expressed himself in *Ask Adventure* on the subject of government poisoning of

rodents and predatory animals, which he fiercely hates and claims to spread destruction beyond the animals it is desired to "control." We have an objection from W. C. Henderson, Acting Chief of the Bureau of Biological Survey, U. S. Department of Agriculture. The copy of the policies of the Biological Survey Mr. Henderson mentions is a seven-page mimeograph issued to combat criticism of the use of poison. This argument is made, that when wildlife becomes destructive to the interests of an individual: "Intolerable conditions force him to do something to protect himself, and as a rule he doesn't know any better methods. His poison capsules are scattered where they menace other wildlife and domestic stock, and his traps are so set to catch animals for which they were not intended. The only way to reduce the unnecessary damage caused by such individual activities is to have competent, highly specialized, and scientifically equipped agencies to do the work."

How much weight there is in this argument I am not in position to know, but fairness requires the publication of Mr. Henderson's letter.

Reference is made to your November 1937 issue, page 133, under the title Balancing Wildlife's Book in Penn's Wood. A request for information is made by Elmer Mundy of Philadelphia, Pa., to which a reply is made by Mr. Raymond S. Spears.

Regarding Mr. Spears' reply we wish to comment to the effect that the comparison he has made in wildlife conditions as they exist in Pennsylvania and in California is not in accord with the findings and observations of this Bureau. We do not believe that one can make a comparison between these two areas on the basis of square miles, for the reason that a large percentage of the area of California is in no way comparable from a production standpoint to a like-sized area in Pennsylvania, where wildlife is the product being produced. As you know, California has immense areas of desert and semi-desert lands which could not possibly under the most ideal conditions produce as much wildlife per square mile as under the humid conditions which exist in the State of Pennsylvania. Mr. Spears also makes the statement that in California $2,000,000 per year is expended in scattering poison to destroy wildlife. According to the records of this Bureau this figure is greatly exaggerated.

It is true that in California a considerable amount of rodent control and predatory-animal control work is carried on. The control of the larger predators and destructive rodents in that area is essential to the successful production of livestock as well as valuable farm crops. Also, Sylvatic plague is prevalent among several species of rodents in a number of counties in California. This is an added necessity for controlling the abundance of injurious rodents in those areas.

A copy of the policies of the Biological Survey in connection with the control of predators and rodents is enclosed herewith for your information. Control work is not conducted by this Bureau in the western States unless there is a specific need in the area where such control is prosecuted. In the field operations every attempt is made to protect all species of wildlife except the one toward which control measures are directed. We have for many years conducted research looking toward improvements of control practices and have made many developments and improvements in this direction, both from the standpoint of controlling destructive mammals as well as from the standpoint of more fully protecting valuable species.

IN THE last issue a critic assailed a spy story on the ground that the code trick it employed was used in a different fashion in the World War. I defended the author, rightly I think, because he was writing fiction and could use the code trick as he pleased. I went on to say, too brashly, that the critic, a naval officer, would not find the *Flying Dutchman* in Lloyd's Register or *Treasure Island* on his charts, but that didn't destroy the interest of the stories about them.

That issue has not gone on sale, and so no readers have yet called me to task. But it's likely they will. I've discovered there is a *Flying Dutchman* in Lloyd's Register, a sloop owned by a gentleman on Long Island, and all too probably someone will point out a Treasure Island on a chart.

H. B.

ASK ADVENTURE

Information
you can't get elsewhere

FOLK art—the Alaskan Billiken.

Request:—Quite a good many years ago I spent some time in Alaska—in St. Michaels and vicinity, to be exact. While there I purchased several curious ivory carvings which appealed to me at the time but the history of which I never troubled to investigate.

These little carvings were quite original and were known thereabouts as "Billikens". I was informed that they were carved by the natives. As the years passed these little carvings aroused more and more interest among my friends; so much, in fact, that the collection of twenty-five odd pieces dwindled down to four. I should like to replace them if possible.

Could you give me the address of a merchant who might be able to supply me with a varied collection of these carvings and who would take the trouble to describe, via mail, those for sale?

—P. R. Potts, St. Louis, Mo.

Reply by Mr. T. S. Solomons:—Your "Billikens" carvings I remember well. I can't quite make out from your letter whether you regard them as original with Alaska—I mean the form and the name, etc. The fact is there was a kind of "Billiken" fad or craze in the States at the time, like the Kupie doll craze—the two resembling each other quite a bit, by the way—and the natives of Alaska simply copied them in their carvings. Anything to turn an honest penny whittling ivory.

As it was a short-lived fad I doubt if the natives continued to make them, but they may have. Anyhow, write the Alaska Bureau of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce, Seattle, Wash., and ask them if they will kindly give you the names of some dealers in Seattle, and also in Alaskan coast towns who handle Eskimo and Indian curios of that sort. That will be your best bet on learning if the critters are still in the market. Sorry I cannot give you names of dealers myself.

THE Union of South Africa offers a great variety of climates.

Request:—I am very much interested in Transvaal, South Africa. Will you furnish me some information on how to get there, age limit for children without a mother, and the amount of cash required to land?

I know some people in Johannesburg but have been unable to make contact lately with

them. How much does a passage out there cost?

—E. L., San Diego, Calif.

Reply by Major S. L. Glenister:—There are practically no restrictions on immigration to members of the white races.

It is not usually necessary to deposit any sum of money with the immigration authorities. But, you will be asked to show the sum of one hundred pounds sterling to prove to the authorities that you are equipped to pay your way until you find employment.

This is the minimum sum which every immigrant must have in his possession. You mention children, but do not state number or ages. If you have several children of school age or under, the authorities would require you to have a larger sum in your possession, unless you have friends or relatives already in the Union who would vouch that you would not become a public charge.

The Union Castle Line maintain a monthly service of freight boats, with accommodation for a limited number of passengers, from New York to Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London, and Durban. This company maintain a mail and passenger service of large and fast liners from Southampton weekly.

There are several other lines running from New York to these same South African ports, mostly freighters with a limited amount of passenger accommodation. The names of these companies, their sailings and passenger rates, you can obtain from shipping agencies right in your home town.

If you really intend going to South Africa, I would advise you to go to Cape Town. You could probably find employment in your own line there. After working a few weeks you could proceed to Johannesburg if that is your desire. The distance is one thousand twenty-four miles between the two cities. The railway is government owned and the trains are very comfortable. Long distance trains consist of large steel coaches, similar to the American Pullman, but divided into four berth compartments, with running water in each compartment. The end rooms, which in American Pullmans are wash-up and lavatory compartments, in the South African coaches are equipped with shower baths with hot and cold water. These trains carry dining cars and serve full meals at a fixed price, which is much cheaper than prices on the American dining cars.

I would advise you that South Africa is a country of high wages and high living expenses. No white man works for less than one pound sterling per day. That is the minimum allowed by law. The great majority earn very much more.

Whilst living is expensive and wages high throughout the Union, I would advise you also that in Johannesburg the wage rates and cost of living, are considerably higher than in other cities of the Union.

Please understand very thoroughly, that unskilled labor has no market. All unskilled labor is performed by the local colored races. In fact, in Cape Province and Natal Province, there are several thousand colored mechanics. But in the Orange Free State and the Transvaal the natives have less rights than in the old British provinces.

The climate of the entire Union is healthy. In fact, I have spent several years there, have lived in all four provinces, and have also lived four years in San Francisco and Los Angeles, and I can say with the utmost sincerity that the South African climate excels the Californian.

South Africa is a two language country, English and the Taal. Taal is South African Dutch. A knowledge of Dutch is essential; in fact, there are many jobs that cannot be obtained without the two languages.

South Africa is up to date with every comfort that you have in the States. You don't need to take any special equipment, as everything can be purchased locally.

Johannesburg being about five or six thousand feet above sea level, the nights are chilly. During June, July, and August, the coldest months, light frosts are prevalent at night. These disappear the moment the sun appears. The temperature during the cold season averages around sixty degrees during the day.

At the coast, Cape Town for instance, there is a great difference. During the cold season the temperature gets as low as fifty-sixty degrees during the day. Around Christmas you will experience days of one hundred and five in the shade.

The Union contains a white population of about two million and between seven and eight million natives. It is a country of vast distances. Owing to the varying elevations, it produces both tropical and temperate clime products. For instance, it grows grapes, apples, wheat and corn. And it grow sugar cane and pineapples.

HAY FOOT, straw foot are shod in the best hiking shoe.

Request:—I have been trying for some

time to obtain the right type of footwear for hiking in all sorts of conditions. I'm looking for a shoe that won't blister or cause sore feet and one that will last well.

Some say a light oxford shoe is as practical as the heavier woodsman's shoe. What would you suggest for a one hundred eighty pound man? I am planning a long trek thru northwest states next spring.

—Charles F. Champion, Hawaii.

Reply by Dr. C. P. Fordyce:—I think that the army munson last shoe is the best for the feet in any type of walking. You will find some of the members of the Mountaineer Club of Seattle use the high top boots, but I have tried them all and I like the garrison army shoes best. They conform to the shape of the feet and are not extra heavy.

Be sure to get them at least a size larger than those used for ordinary wear and use heavy wool socks. The wool insulation as well as the cushion effect on the feet is good.

THERE are organized bicycle trips in Europe. Why not try Mexico?

Request:—I am contemplating a trip on a bicycle—the push variety and not a motorcycle—from the Texas border, throughout the length of Mexico, across and into Guatemala, and possibly as far south as Limon, Costa Rica, where I could get a ship back for New York. I'd probably go alone, and my idea is to take off on the new highway which goes from the border to Mexico City. I have been in Guatemala, accompanying an archeologist, and once as far as Quezhaltenango, so I would not be on too unfamiliar grounds.

But about Mexico, since I know little but a few scraps of its history, a phrase or two of Spanish, and a vague idea as to its climatic and geographical divisions, I have a barrage of questions to ask.

Are the main routes fairly well patroled, or are they infested with bandits? Would it be advisable to carry a gun, and can one get a permit to do the same? I don't mind a reasonable risk, but would avoid jumping into a hornet's nest.

I would be safe against smallpox, and typhoid through inoculation, but would one be much exposed to malaria, yellow fever or dysentery, also typhus?

About how high would one go, and what could one expect in the way of cold weather, between the border and Mexico City?

Assuming that one could do at least ten miles per day on the worst trails, and seventy-five on a good automobile highway, could one find food and shelter for every night? One cannot pack much on a bicycle.

I figure that I ought to be able to do this trip, including the boat ride back, for a maximum of six hundred dollars. Do you think that sufficient? American Express checks are good in all the larger centers, aren't they?

Do you think I can get from the border to Mexico City in two weeks?

What season would be the best time to do this trip?

—Stuart E. Elliott, Osterville, Mass.

Reply by Mr. John Newman Page:—Mexico's main highways are well policed, on the whole. Woe be unto the poor bandit who plies his trade on those highways and gets caught—especially if he has plied it upon the persons or property of American tourists. I remember the case of four *bandidos* who made this mistake in the state of Morelos, while I was located there. The *bandidos* were caught, the property of their American victims was recovered and identified, and the culprits were taken by federal soldiers to the scene of the holdup to "reconstruct" the crime. The *soldados* returned with four dead *bandidos*, shot "while attempting to escape."

The bodies were exhibited publicly for two days, and the grim point in the exhibition was that each naked body showed just one wound—that made by a bullet which entered the right eye.

No, I do not advise carrying a gun for self-protection. You will run a "reasonable risk" on your trip, certainly, but possession of a gun would only increase it. There are Mexicans who would not be at all tempted by your six hundred dollars, but would hack you to pieces with their machetes to get your rifle or pistol.

One seldom hears of yellow fever in Mexico but there is some typhus and dysentery and, in the hot regions, a great deal of malaria. Be careful of your drinking water and you will run little risk from typhus or dysentery; and take quinine for the first three days of each week as a preventive against malaria.

You will reach an altitude of approximately ten thousand feet shortly before reaching Mexico City, which itself is about seven thousand eight hundred feet above sea level. Winter freezing temperatures are the exception, not the rule.

It will be nice to have six hundred dollars, but you won't need that much for your *necessary* expenditures. Except in the big cities, you can get about the best that Mexico affords in the way of food, drink and shelter

for an average of less than a dollar a day (three *pesos* and sixty *centavos* in Mexican money). You can cash your Am. Exp. checks in Mexico City, Oaxaca City and Tehuantepec.

The distance from Laredo to Mexico City is eight hundred and fifteen miles, over one of the best highways in North America. Much of it will be upgrade, but the engineers claim that no grade exceeds six percent.

The winter is by far the best season. In most parts of Mexico there is very little rain between November first and June first.

In closing let me emphasize the absolute necessity of knowing some Spanish. You won't need it greatly in Northern Mexico, where the roads are good and the highways are studded with hotels and restaurants with English-speaking help. But south of Mexico City, where the roads are bad and little English is spoken, you can't get along without it. I don't mean you must speak it fluently; just well enough to make intelligent inquiries about what lies just ahead. You can do that with comparatively little Spanish, for you will find everyone willing to explain things over and over to you, with the greatest patience, until you understand them.

That's a wonderful trip you are contemplating, and I envy you. Write me when you get back, will you?

DAVEY JONES' locker overflows on the rich ocean floor.

Request:—A number of years ago, possibly ten or fifteen, I read an article of yours in *Adventure* regarding some pearling grounds on the west coast of Central America where a man with a seaworthy boat might possibly grab off a living.

If you will give me the location of oyster beds you mentioned in your article and the government regulations as to dredging or diving in those waters, I shall be very grateful.

—Art. D. Crow, Portland, Ore.

Reply by Mr. Edgar Young:—The article you mention was written with the facts I had gleaned at Corinto, Nicaragua. With another fellow and a beachcomber, I had the rather silly idea of trying to get down to the safe of the old *San Juan* which sank in the bay and recovering some $40,000 reputed to have been in the safe when she sank. This was the old, old *San Juan* of the Pacific Mail and the superstructure showed for years in the harbor. Then she went on down and could be seen through a pail with the bottom knocked out in some forty feet of water. In order to keep the *Jefe Politico* off, we started a small fishing business with the hint that we would do some pearling on the side and we bought a diving suit, second hand and in bad repair, in Panama. We intended to sneak out at night and try to get into the purser's office and get a half hitch on the safe and drag it up. One or the other of us got high on cactus brandy and talked, and the *Jefe Politico* issued an order that no fishing or pearling boats could enter or leave the harbor except in daylight and we gave up the project.

However, by being in this business for a month or so we did find out that quite a few pearls were handled by natives and that buyers came now and then from France to buy them.

Most of the shells were brought up by women divers and my partner was in this sort of thing for a few trips after I went on up inland. There were no regular pearl boats but the thing was carried on in a sort of haphazard fashion at that time. I saw one very valuable pearl sold at San Juan del Sur to a Frenchman.

The main pearl business at that time was at the Pearl Islands off the Panama coast. Pearls are found all along the southern Mexican and Central American coasts and the records of the old Spanish mariners tell how they found the Carib Indians with baskets of fine pearls off the coasts on the other side, notably Venezuela. If my memory serves me these pearls were not in oysters but in conches or some similar shells. If you have a boat you could drift on down and tie up to one of the wharves and live on as little as two dollars a month by ground-hogging it native way on beans, fish, and corn cakes until you got onto the ropes. Wages in my time ran about twenty cents a day for men and half that for women so if you could prod around and discover a bed of shells you could get the work done mighty cheap. The San Blas Indians down below Colon on the other side also have pearls, gold, etc., to trade for goods and if you were on that side you could make a living trading and have what you made on pearls as velvet.

PUTTING a motorcycle engine on ice.

Request:—Where could I get a motorcycle engine? I am planning to make a snow sled

and I'd like to know if a motorcycle engine would have power enough to push one man with thirty younds of luggage?

Do you know how big the propeller would have to be?

This, I know, is out of your field. But perhaps you could tell me where to get this information.

—Oscar A. Gagnon, Chesuncook, Me.

Reply by Mr. Charles M. Dodge:—You can get a good motorcycle motor at almost any motorcyele dealer's; and for the purpose you want it, you shouldn't have to pay more than $15 or $20—$25 at the most. It doesn't matter how old the motor might be so long as it's in good running shape. In other words you could pick up a motor out of an old bike which couldn't possibly be sold as an up-to-date motorcycle—but in which the power plant is still perfectly all right in every way. Get a seventy-four cubic inch job, and you'll be all set.

One of these big twin seventy-four inch motors will be plenty to propel an ice boat, and mounted right back of the propeller it will get the air it needs to keep cool. The Heath airplane Company of Detroit, Michigan could quote you on a small propeller of the type you want, as they're experienced in putting motorcycle motors into gliders. Be sure the motor is mounted sideways—that is, opposite to its direction in the motorcycle. In that way you get the benefit of a direct drive off the shaft without having to go around corners with gears, etc.

A CANINE pedicure—

Request:—Can you tell me what to do about my greyhound's feet when they get sore and cracked and hard. I hope you know what to do for this.

—C. H. Nygard, Kindred, N. J.

Reply by Mr. "Ozark Ripley" Thompson—Bathe your dog's feet in a solution of water and alcohol. Have the water as hot as he can stand it. Then, three time a day, rub his pads with a resinol ointment to which you have added some powdered boracic acid. Keep up this treatment for a while and feed him plenty of meat—no starchy foods.

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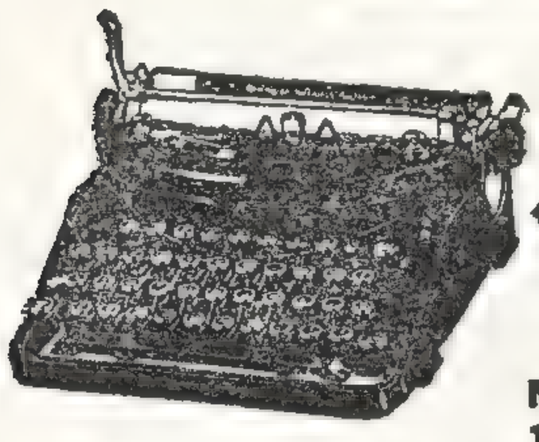

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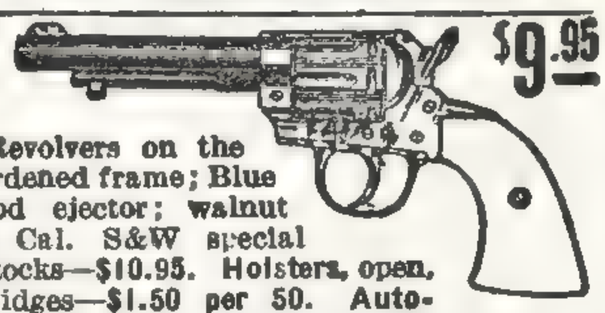

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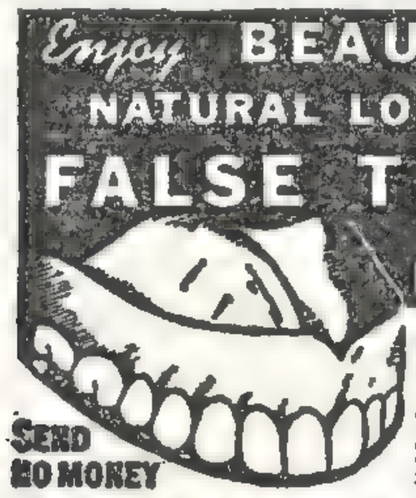

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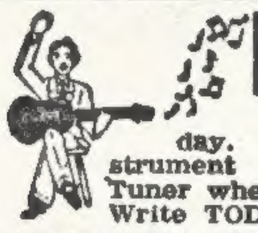

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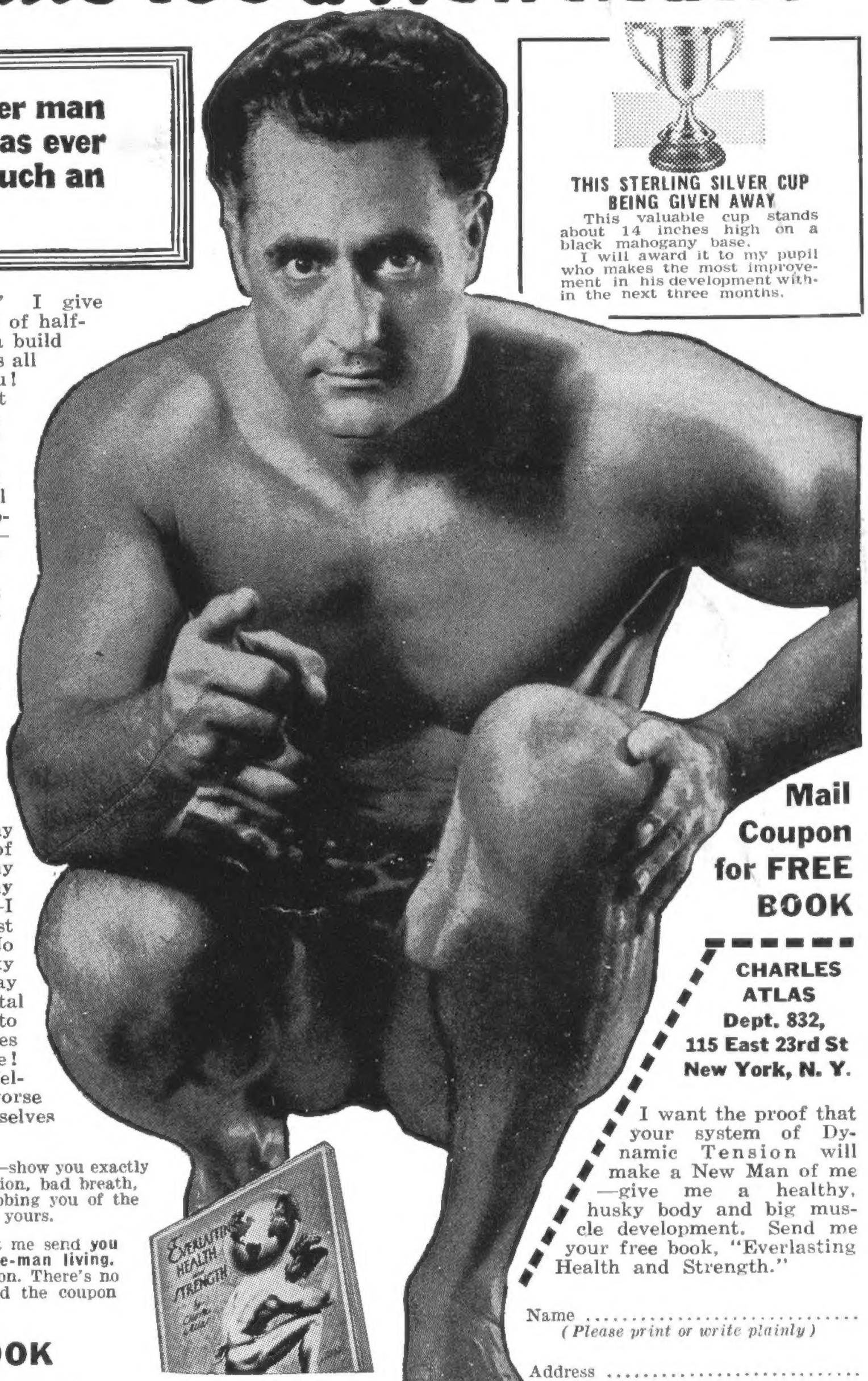

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